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# Escapist Tendencies as Evidenced in the Poetry of the Romantic Poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron

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Escapist tendencies as evidenced in the poetry  
of the Romantic poets: Wordsworth,  
Coleridge, Shelley, Keats,  
and Byron.

by

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## Preface

"The world is too much with us." This is the keynote of escapism in the English Romantic Movement as evidenced by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron. The world had closed too tightly about man in the previous age. Therefore, there breaks forth around 1800 the reaction to the conventionality, the formalism in life, thought and feeling.

It is under that aspect that approach to this thesis must be made.

"Escape" is the signification in which the five major Romantic poets and their poetry are here considered. However, - and this is very important, - that "escape" is modulated by a host of varying influences, philosophies, experiences, peculiar to each poet's life and personality. Not only that. The Age itself exerted no small influence, unconscious though it may have been, on the expositions of the poet.

"May there be in a masterpiece reflections of the life of an epoch which the author put there without a thesis or conscious purpose, interpretations which we can recognize as we look back through the mist of years but which the writer, being a part of his time, was no more aware of than of the air he breathed or the food he appropriated to the needs of his body?"<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>

E. Greenlaw, The Province of Literary History, p. 89.

Hence, this consideration of escape tendencies in the poets is a complex problem. No individual poems of the writers indicate conclusively an "escapist." No one man's life is focalized in "escape." Rather there is an intermingling of life-history with world-history; of philosophy and poetry; of writing and living.

Furthermore, a poet's rhythmic utterances of escape take on a strangeness and a beauty because he translates "philosophy into poetry." Through the "shaping power of Imagination" he catches at unreality and makes it real. He strains at the unapparent and makes it apparent.... "apparent pictures of unapparent realities." Poetry is sight, albeit, it is often an evasive vision. The poet's images of escape are oftentimes fleeting, sometimes intangible, not always relevant to the subject at hand, but uncontrollable, reflex thoughts that emerge, unbidden, along the way. No entire poem appears wholly "escapist." There is rather an expectancy of the escape theme, like a chord held sounding through a tone-picture of a certain phase of life the poet has caught in the meshes of his word-tones. Figures of speech, nuances of thought are employed by the poet in this expression of escapism.

This is especially true if one considers the Romantic Movement simply as "the reawakening of the imagination, a reawakening to a sense of beauty and strangeness in natural things, and in all the impulses of the mind and senses."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, the master-poets of the efflorescent period of English Literature, the Romantic, catching sight of the reality that is life, expressed escape from it in various ways. That very idea of escape became a reality for them. It was composed of philosophies, revolutions, religions. Escape with them was not one thing, one movement. It was many things to each poet. And it was not the only solution to the intermittent revolutions, personal or impersonal, that thwart man's quest and hunger for happiness. There were other solutions, other suggestions, but one of those which held the attention of those poets who wanted to find the Eternal Beauty and Truth and the One was escape. Hence in the light of these heart-hungerings, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron have been, to a certain extent in this thesis "personalized." This is justified in the light that to the poets "poetry is transcript of life; it is experience transposed into spiritual reality."<sup>3</sup>

Hence, the escape implications and significations in the various poetic works of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Bryon will be considered relative to the man and against the background of his own peculiar philosophies, influences, and material interests. Isolation of these personalities from the peculiar temperament which marked the period from 1798-1832 in England would not be just to them.

If then a proper understanding of the escape theme in the Romantic poets is to be achieved it is imperative that we understand the age in which

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<sup>3</sup>

Greenlaw, op. cit., p. 127.

these poets lived. Therefore, the first chapter gives this philosophical, religious and social background. The other five chapters then proceed to a critical but not too objective appraisal of each of the five major poets.

My deep appreciation is due to Dr. S. M. Steward for his patient bearing with the work of this thesis, as well as for the valuable suggestions in formulating and bringing this thesis to a successful issue. My sincere thanks are extended to those members of my Congregation whose interest was an indispensable and heartening aid.

Holy Thursday, 1941.

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## CHAPTER I

### Philosophical, Religious, and Social Influences on the Escapist Movement.

The escape theme is only one characteristic of the Romantic Movement. Vagueness, mystery, aspiration, individuality, revolt, isolation from society, love of nature, confidence in man's innate powers-- are other characteristics equally important. So vitally significant, however, in the lives of individual authors of the period and on posterity in general were the results of escapism that a survey of the philosophical, religious, and social forces which helped to usher it in is imperative.

"Escape" implies a dissatisfaction with things as they are. It is obvious, then, that existing conditions in the period immediately preceding the Romantic Movement must have fostered dissatisfaction and invited flight in any one of the mind's "labyrinthine ways." Strangely enough, all this occurred in an age marked by extreme satisfaction, self-complacency, smugness-- the Classic period. Yet it was the philosophy of this age, its religion-- or lack of religion, its social conditions, that pointed the way to everyone seeking escape.

Philosophically the Classic Age was marked by the dominance of reason. Abstract philosophy was the norm of the day. Inquiry into the nature of free will, the use of the senses, the primacy of the intellect, while seeming to establish unified systems of thought, left much room for



speculation, and absolutely no moral code. It is against the latter that Irving Babbitt expounds so scathingly and convincingly in Rousseau and Romanticism. Certainly the seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophers failed to place definitely man's innate powers of intellect, free will and memory in the field of knowledge.

Aided by science, philosophy aimed to enthrone reason in every department of thought. In all things man was to be subservient to reason, "a narrow myopic, purblind reason which would only recognize what was under its nose and refused to see all aspects of life that could not be stated with the clearness and lucidity of the Euclidean problem."<sup>1</sup>

The practical results of the philosophy of reason which the Augustans adopted is thus summarized by Fausset:

"Johnson's gloomy tenderness, Swift's malignity, Shenstone's hypochondria, Gray's melancholy, Smart's and Cooper's madness attest a secret warfare. These men suffered acutely for the arbitrary check imposed upon their generous impulses... life mocking their logic, tortured them with pain and sickness."<sup>2</sup>

Religiously the philosophy of reason made for Deism, that common sense religion that still believed in a God, but a God relegated far beyond the stars and consequently out of the lives of men. Indifferent to eternal issues, eighteenth century writers closed their minds to the Infinite, never seeking to solve the mysteries that lie beyond time and space.

"The greatest men among them," says Leslie Stephen, "a Swift or a Johnson, have indeed a sense-- perhaps a really stronger sense than Browne or Taylor-- of the pettiness of

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<sup>1</sup> V.D. Scudder, Social Ideals in English Letters, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Studies in Idealism, p. 141.

our lives and the narrow limits of our knowledge. No great man could ever be without it. But the awe of the infinite and the unseen does not induce them to brood over the mysterious, and find utterance for bewildered musings on the inscrutable enigma.

It is felt only in a certain habitual sadness which clouds their whole tone of thought. They turn their backs upon the infinite and abandon at a solution. Their eyes are fixed upon the world around them, and they regard as foolish and presumptuous any one who dares to contemplate the darkness."<sup>3</sup>

To a religious languor almost unbelievable in the history of the Church of England were added social conditions that would necessarily breed dissatisfaction, even revolt in any one not dominated by a laissezfaire policy. The Industrial Revolution resulted in the rise of the factory system which in turn produced slums marked by dire poverty and filth. Wages were inadequate; workers were ignorant, demoralized; amusements were of the lowest kind; bestial drunkenness was prevalent. The physical needs of the masses were crying loudly for reform, a reform entirely too long ignored.

Dissatisfaction with all this was inevitable, and reaction there certainly was.

Kant, often called the father of modern philosophy, was responsible for the shift from stress on reason to stress on imagination in man's philosophy of life. The creative spirit, daring the unusual, the unique tends toward ultimate reality, Ding-an-Sich. Schelling went further. He elucidates the reasons why scientific studies were pursued... at least temporarily. In those studies were revealed the phenomena of science as this or that manifestation of God. If by study the spirit within man could

reach to that spirit apparent in objective reality, a Unity, a Mystic Oneness would have been achieved.

Hence, the poets will be seen in their poetic utterance giving voice to this desire. The soul with its imagination, its sense of beauty and order, its yearning for the infinite, its transcendence of material barriers-- all these must be brought to bear to approximate the Absolute. And in that incessant attempt at the approximation lies escape,-- continual, always attempted, although not always definitely expressed.

Necessitarianism and Perfectibility are offered for the soaring spirit. But transcendentalism is the open sesame. Through it the spirit is released, and set free to escape. The development of the Over-Soul; the awareness that as objects appear in the mind-- so they are; that the mind is an "original, active, organizing principle within itself" by which it turns sense-impression into knowledge, --these new teachings were a welcomed reaction.

Individualism, naturally, was the next development and J. G. Fichte was the exponent of this doctrine. Man's complex self was the approximation of Truth. Our very gropings and escapings to the Infinite, although never to be reached, are the infallible criterions of our associations with the divine in elemental things.

Hegel, Spinoza, Schleiermacher had more opinions on mystic, philosophic perception of the Universe, as related to the human spirit and discernible by it.

Further, escape becomes inherent in Romanticism, because the latter was decidedly a revival of wonder and mystery. Truth, Satiety were "pinnacled deep in the intense inane." What more could poets want for escape, given:

first, a spirit that can transcend matter, and secondly, a vast expanse of speculative material, wonderful and mysterious, in which to expand and sharpen one's imagination and intuitive faculties? What more could be desired than to be enabled to leave one after another of the petty lower levels of human thinking and experimenting and escape to the Reality-- of which certain pre-destination is given by the fact of one's very intuitive powers, "sparks of a Divinity"?

In 1800, Haller of Bern, confirmed these ideas by declaring that there was a growth, a system, a cooperation of cosmic tendencies and the soul of man.

Eventually transcendentalism, pantheism, mysticism are reached. These doctrines are used as avenues of escape, as exhilarating, and for the most part, satisfying experiences for a recently emancipated spirit.

In religion, reaction under Wesleyanism occurs. Man is driven to the other extreme after the unsatisfying experiences with smug Deism. The idea of a personal God Who could be reached through the feelings and emotions appealed to tired formal religionists. Charles and John Wesley released the spirit within man, when in encouraging people to come, they stressed not what you believed, nor thought, nor what reason "dictated", but merely that the inner spirit be relieved. By losing oneself in Religious enthusiasm one could escape the doddiness of the classic restraint.

Religion began to appeal to the heart rather than to the head. The period of spiritual lyrics began. Lyric hymns of personal salvation and personal feeling to a personal God were sung. The movement was a democratic and emotional reaction against the Calvinistic and Puritan ideals of the

previous age when emotion was outlawed and all semblance of feeling was confined with in classical modes.

In social conditions, reaction again is the order of the day. It has always been inevitable in the history of English Letters to find it instigated and vitalized by the political conditions of the times. Trace through Beowulf, Chaucer, Medieval, Renaissance writings. The greatness of England's power as well as the pettiness of its strifes is never omitted. Previous to the Romantic period, the evils of the Parliamentary government, the unwholesome justices of the Georgian period were lashed in famous works by satirical writers. "Absalom and Achitophel," "The Dunciad," are pre-eminent. Hence with that tradition, the Romantics felt even more free not to lash at the scourges of society as they met them, but to try to instill something in place of what they met. Hence escapism's peculiar element enters here. The poets would escape from the society they encountered, to build up a Golden Age, ideal-- the solution and remedy of present evils.

Expression and self-assertion were the mode of the day, in politics, in philosophy, in living, and consequently in literature. How the individual was re-evaluated and sublimated has already been noted. In politics, oratory was the fashion.

"It was the Golden Age of parliamentary oratory. No modern assembly has matched for lofty eloquence the Houses of Commons that listened to the speeches of the two Pitts, Burke, Fox and Sheridan. English painting then produced its greatest masterpieces from the hands of Reynolds, Gainsborough and Romney, Wit and social refinement were illustrated by the conversations of Johnson and Burke, and by the letter-writing of Horace Walpole, Gray and Cowper."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> W.J. Courthope, A History of English Poetry, Vol. V, p. 224.

Following a period in which critics and reviewers, orators and thinkers, as well as writers tried to mould public opinion to lines of political development, a gradual shift is bound to occur. The Whigs had settled the social fabric of Constitutional Liberty quite snugly. But the defeat of the Tory prophecied a return and vindication later. Society had been taught to reason. Classical rules, restrictions, correctness marked the line of human conduct. Hence when those elements in society and man that had been disfranchised, clamored for attention, at first feebly in the first part of the eighteenth century, they were introduced by reason, and so who would dispute their rights? Hence Godwin and his Political Justice is the lever to introduce the Romantic ideas.

Under the artificiality of the previous period, much error, confusion, shallowness, grossness and prejudice has existed. Godwin's doctrine penetrated to this corruption. It stated that since man's very conception of life was false, those institutions, laws, and customs which had hindered his full development and fruition should be abolished. These dictums were carried to extremes. No force of any kind should be in vogue. The city with its restrictions; man with his inhibitions must be delivered up. What could be more inviting and encouraging to the young Romanticists? Rousseau promised Nature's civilization as the fulfillment of all the suppressed desires of the classically molded man. Hence to escape from such conditions the Romantics meet these conditions with the philosophy of Godwin and Rousseau.

The Industrial Revolution further instigated a glorification of rural and rustic life as a means of possible escape from the uninviting conditions

of city squalor, and too close contact with the grim realities of life. Historically speaking, the Industrial Revolution resulting in the rise of commercial towns and factory systems was no impetus for imaginative and transcendently- shaped minds. The poets resorted to a land of dreams, trying to hold at arm's length the truly unromantic conditions of society.

Another mode of escape from the perplexity of the new life was by recourse to the remote in time and place. The mind was thus emancipated from the petty and found itself refreshed after the struggle with new problems. This recourse to the past appealed to all: the Cavalier, for he loved tradition and the ideals of chivalry; class pride maintained itself upon precedent; the labor element looked to the ideal medieval trade conditions; the conservative wooed the past because the radical was trying to overthrow those very traditions. The poet had less grim material for metaphysical speculation, in the golden glory of a past age, its misery vanished, and only its idealism remaining.

The antiquarians fostered this recourse to the past. Prosaic facts like the publicity concerning the Herculaneum in 1709; the excavations of 1738; and the Pompeian researches of 1755 led to the glorifying of antiquity.

This revival of the past was further encouraged and stabilized in the literary world by Richard Hurd in his Letters on Chivalry and Romance; Percy's Reliques of Ancient Poetry, which "charged the strain of sadness with the wail of wistful longing,"<sup>5</sup> Wharton's Observations on the Faerie Queene

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<sup>5</sup>C.E. Vaughn, The Romantic Revolt, p. 9.

and Joseph Wharton's The Enthusiast. The appearance of Northern mythology, Welsh poetry, Ossianism were only a few more of the places of refuge for the pre-Romantic escapists. Percy and Ritson revived the Scottish Border ballad literature; Collins and Gray stirred up the Teutonic and Celtic myths; and the far-off land of Aladdin, Moore and Southey sought.

The world movements, of which the Romantic poets' environment was vitally shaped, were synonymous with the questions which disturbed English complacency at that time.

The American Revolution with the consequent loss of colonies was offset by the conquest of India. Nevertheless the principle underlying the revolution was subject for vehement protest and purposeful thinking among English heads. Not that defiance of authority attracted man. But the glorification of man, regardless of his place in society, of his independence of convention as exemplified in the American Revolution gave man a millenium to hope for, to strive to achieve by escape from present dilemmas of society and its restrictions.

The French Revolution touched England more seriously. With its cry of Fraternity, Liberty and Equality, the great "morning of the world" seemed about to dawn. Man with his social and personal privileges was to be democratically re-instated. That promise, under the strong Whig authority in England, appealed to the masses, Escape was possible--now. England caught glimpses of a human race, enfranchised and transfigured, with a goal to which to escape from the petty toils of man; to escape from evil, for good would triumph; to escape from law, for brotherhood and love would be victors.



"The spirit of man craved for something perfect, infinite, absolute."<sup>6</sup> The philosophical, religious, and social background have shown that. Escape was in the air. The escape was agitated both from within and, and from conditions without. The philosophies of the day helped man to transcend his own limitations, of which he had been made so aware by the preceding Age. The religious reaction aided him to release his pent-up spiritual feelings. The unstable political and social condition, both in England and France released the desire to build up an ideal society and fraternity.

Contact with all these social reactions and tendencies, with these philosophies was amply provided for the five leading Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Byron. They were all of a high mental calibre, leading no isolated intellectual lives. Wordsworth had matriculated at St. John's College; Coleridge at Jesus College, Cambridge; Shelley at Oxford; Keats had promiscuous contacts with a diversity of avenues for philosophical speculation; and Byron, unwillingly at Cambridge.

Imbued with the schools of thought mentioned under the philosophical reactions of the times, and realistically aware of the conditions, social and religious, the five major poets went out to reform society, at least in theory. But strangely enough, they themselves fled from reality in various ways as will be indicated in the following chapters.

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<sup>6</sup> E. Dowden, Studies in Literature, 1789-1877, p. 59.

## CHAPTER II

### Wordsworth: The Philosophical Escapist.

"The world is too much with us" not only characterizes the entire Escapist Movement but epitomizes the escapist tendencies in Wordsworth. He wanted to turn his back on a "world" that offered three reasons for him to escape. He wanted to escape from the city, trammled by convention and commercialization, to nature, free, glorious, luxuriant in its nobility: the voice, friend, nurse, mother, guide, solace of man. Secondly, Wordsworth desired to escape from man, depraved by vice and limitations, his higher faculties benighted by the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution and find surcease, and realization of his humanitarian ideals in nature's man, rejuvenated by nature, blossoming to full fruition of all his powers under Nature's benign and chastening influence. Thirdly, Wordsworth wanted, in a personal ultimatum, to escape from his personal disillusionment to personal rehabilitation.

In moods of escape it is evident that it is rather an intellectual than an emotional escape. It is an objective escape with a subjective purpose. Wordsworth would relieve himself, not so much of himself, as of those exterior circumstances which aggravate and disturb him.

And he would go to nature, not for any objective purpose, but wholly and solely as an antidote for his personal intellectual needs. He cannot

endure city life and so he will live at least in spirit, if not in reality, in nature's haunts. Becoming disillusioned in man's intellectual power, he assures solace for himself, not mankind, by having recourse to an ethical code based on man's conduct, once it is rejuvenated by imbibing Nature's teachings. And finally, he will try to escape from himself to become one of Nature's mystics, a transcendentalist and almost a pantheist.

It is obvious then, that the escapist tendencies evidenced in Wordsworth's poetry are of a philosophical and ethical tone. To arrive at this exposition, it would seem logical to consider first the exterior circumstances of the world at large from which Wordsworth escaped and the resulting expression in his poetry. Then his escape from man himself to Nature's man will be surveyed and commented. In both instances Wordsworth, escaping from a fallen world and a fallen man went to Nature, but with this difference: in the first instance he sought in Nature idealized living conditions for society as a whole, and in the second instance, he went to Nature for those personal, ethical and philosophical bases as surcease for his personal disappointments in man as a social, human being. The one escape was general; the other, particular. Finally, the third, takes in the other two and synthesizes them: Wordsworth seeing all his philosophy and his own personal "self" in Nature. All this is a slow process, one mood dovetailing the other; no distinctive boundaries for anyone of them; yet each distinct, at some period in his life.

Noting then, Wordsworth's escape from commercialized society, he is not the first to rebel against its condition. Goldsmith in "The Deserted Village" regrets the passing of fair Auburn.

Lady Winchelsea in "A Nocturnal Reverie" after describing a nature-bountiful night, continues:

"In such a night let me abroad remain  
Till morning breaks and all's confused again;  
Our cares, our toils, our clamours are reviewed,  
Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued." (ll. 46-50)

"Grongar Hill" of John Dyer is a typical poem of the return to Nature. Pre-eminently "The Seasons" by James Thomson glorify nature.

These, as it were, encourage Wordsworth to go to Nature. Hence, in the famous sonnet, the first lines of which were quoted at the opening of this chapter, Wordsworth voices his escape:

"The World is too much with us, late and soon;  
Getting and spending we lay waste our powers;  
Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon."

Specifically, Wordsworth is dismayed at "the artificiality, the complexity, the patent fraud and wretched poverty, the contrasting conditions of rich and poor."<sup>1</sup> He escapes from a world of commercial competition because "it blinds him to the loveliness which he believes to exist in natural scenes."<sup>2</sup>

His friend, Robert Southey, expresses the mutual sentiment in "On a Landscape of Gaspar Poussin."

"The rapt soul  
From the foul haunts of herded mankind  
Flies far away with spirit speed, and tastes

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<sup>1</sup> G.F. Richardson, "A Neglected Aspect of the English Romantic Revolt," Modern Philology, Vol. III, no. 2 (May 20, 1915), p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> E.M. Forster, "Philosophy of Escape," London Mercury, Vol. XXXIX, (December, 1938), p. 127.

The untainted air that with the lively hue  
Of health and happiness illumines the cheek  
Of mountain liberty."<sup>3</sup>

Wordsworth by his very choice of residence in the Lake District proves his escape from city life. Gradually this district, too, becomes revolutionized and he foresees:

"Change wide, and deep, and silently performed  
This Land shall witness; and as days roll on,  
Earth's universal frame shall feel the effect;  
Even till the smallest habitable rock,  
Beaten by lonely billows, hear the songs  
Of humanized society." (ll. 384-389)

On revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a walking tour with his sister, Wordsworth recalls the former happy, pastoral condition of this land.

"Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lanes  
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,  
Green to the very door: and wreaths of smoke  
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!  
With some uncertain notice, as might seem  
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,  
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire  
The Hermit sits alone. These beauteous forms  
Through the long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye;  
But oft in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them  
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet." (ll. 15-27)

In derision and some pity for those who cannot escape from conventionalized society he writes "Star Gazers." The slight poem depicts a crowd looking through a telescope and either because of their poverty, or their lack of imagination, "Souls which never yet have risen," - have not power to escape but merely turn away.

"Not have I one espied  
That doth not slackly go away, as if dissatisfied." (l. 10)

These people have not the faculty to escape the drabness of their lives. This is significant because it really was only the poets and people of artistic temperament who sought surcease from a hampered imagination which city life effected.

A motley London crowd acknowledges "The Power of Music" in the poem by that name. Wordsworth sees all the labor-burdened poor hungering for escape. They temporarily find it in a street musician and so

"Now, coaches and chariots! roar on like a stream;  
Here are twenty souls happy as souls in a dream  
They are deaf to your murmurs--they care not for you,  
Nor what ye are flying, nor what ye pursue." (ll. 41-45)

Reading the personal memoirs at the head of Wordsworth's poems gives a further insight to the extent to which Wordsworth tried to escape from the commercial life of the English towns and to become attached to the simple rustic life and scenes of his own Lake District.

As a contemporary of the French Revolution, Wordsworth was at first fascinated by its cry of "Equality, Fraternity and Liberty." He dreamed that at last the Utopia which he had been seeking in England in his escape from its factory system and consequent commercialization, had been realized in France.

"Influenced by Michel Beaupuis, he was caught in the rising tide of the French Revolution, which promised to sweep on to a golden era of universal peace and happiness."<sup>4</sup> Irving Babbitt continues to describe Wordsworth's

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<sup>4</sup> Sister M. Eunice Rasin, Evidences of Romanticism in the Poetry of Medieval England, p. 81.

"dream." In the first flush of his revolutionary enthusiasm France seemed to him to be "standing on the top of golden hours and pointing the way to a new birth of human nature."<sup>5</sup>

Wordsworth himself crowns the plan with:

"Add to this, subservience from the first  
To presences of God's mysterious power  
Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty,  
And fellowship with venerable books,  
To sanction the proud workings of the soul,  
And mountain liberty"..... Prelude (Bk. IX 11. 233-37)

With the failure and tragic close of the French Revolution Wordsworth "turned to philosophy, and, still trusting revolutionary theories, became an ardent disciple of William Godwin, admitting which reason could not prove and, in opposition to the attitude of his youth, toiled intent to anatomize the frame of social life."<sup>6</sup>

Godwin's Political Justice gave him all he needed--temporarily. The unexplored Utopia of democracy was the ideal to which Wordsworth fled.....

"more ardent in that it was based on the belief in the original goodness and ultimate perfectibility of man and justified the most absolute optimism. For the great consummation to which all tends is nothing less than a perfected race, all base appetities crushed under man's feet, old age averted, and the immortality of a perfect body attained on earth, under the law of perfect reason."<sup>7</sup>

To Wordsworth, Godwin's Necessitarianism would make the progress of the race an inevitable one.

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<sup>5</sup> Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> Rasin, op. cit., p. 81.

<sup>7</sup> A. Beatty, Wordsworth, p. 24.

"So build we up the Being that we are;  
Thus deeply drinking in the soul of things,  
We shall be wise perforce."

The Excursion, (Bk. IV, ll. 1264-66)

And in The Prelude he eulogizes the future for the Godwinian disciple:

"How glorious in self-knowledge and self-rule  
To look through all the frailties of the world,  
And, with a resolute mastery shaking off  
Infirmities of nature, time and place,  
Build social upon personal Liberty," (Bk. XI, ll. 236-240)

But Godwin drove him to despair for he failed to find satiety. Wordsworth tried to solve the riddle of existence by Godwin's theory--but discounting, choice and hope and fear. Critics portray him fluctuating between 1793-1796 as an ardent disciple of Godwin and then as a wavering adherent to his cause. Finally he abandons it:

"This was the crisis of that strong disease,  
This the soul's last and lowest ebb; I drooped,  
Deeming our blessed reason of least use  
Where wanted most." (ll. 305-309)

Gradually his only means of escape from the blighted life of the past is nature--not yet the deep philosophy of nature--but the Arcadian wilderness. The Lake District again proves a balm! He becomes engrossed in the simple life and simple emotions of the rural characters. "Wordsworth believes that the Lake Country shepherds are on the whole the happiest and best of men. Although by no means perfect, they are the least corrupted people known, and their virtues show what nature intended man to be."<sup>8</sup>

"In reaction against the reasoned ideal of the French Revolution and the arid pedantry of Godwin he had thrown himself on the primitive instincts of

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<sup>8</sup> H.N. Fairchild, The Romantic Quest, p. 99.



human heart; those instincts which are "permanent" just because they are "obscure and dark"...and which have the "nature of infinity."<sup>9</sup>

Probably, the second means of escape is more evident in Wordsworth's poetry. Only a cursory glance at the titles of the poems, especially those composed after 1798 up to 1805, reveals the many that center around a rustic character. The hunter, the bard, the miller, the Cumberland beggar, the "Idiot Boy" "The Solitary Reaper," "Lucy," "Michael," are the specific glorified rustics one meets, besides many others, unnamed but part of the woodland beauty that is theirs. They live isolated, but contented and happy lives among ideal Nature surroundings from which they derive the only true and satisfying philosophy of life.

This pastoral doctrine of Wordsworth's takes direct reference from a philosopher of the age, who did much in determining Wordsworth's escape to nature and his glorifying of its inhabitants, and that is Rousseau. His cry was "Back to Nature." He "emphasized the natural gifts of man, instinct, intuition, insight, with special stress on the inherent goodness of children."<sup>10</sup>

Man is good of himself and under Nature's direct teaching will live most happily and develop most completely. Nature will respond to all the needs of Man. Wordsworth glorified this in his escape to nature, as a civilization all its own and superior to all others.

Now again in his escape from man, marred by intellectual inhibitions, to man, rejuvenated by nature's direct teaching, he follows Rousseau's doctrine.

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<sup>9</sup>

C.E. Vaughn, The Romantic Revolt, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup>

S.F. Gingerich, Essays in the Romantic Poets, p. 102.

There is further evidence of this in his great works. In The Excursion, Wanderer and Solitary are the important characters who teach the only worthwhile knowledge. The Prelude and The Recluse abound in Nature's characters. Their moral code is simpler: Close to Nature they imbibe the only true philosophy of life. Hence, Wordsworth resolves:

"Of these (the rustics) said I, shall be my song;  
If future years mature me for the task,  
Will I record the praises, making verse  
Deal boldly with substantial things. My theme  
No other than the very heart of man."<sup>11</sup>

Further following of Rousseau's doctrine as a means of escape is advanced in his adherence to the idea of "inherent goodness of children." Wordsworth glorified childhood in his Lucy poems. He gives to the escape into childhood a personal connotation as evidenced in "Influence of Natural Objects," "There Was A Boy," "Nutting," "The Tables Turned," Book I of The Prelude, and superbly, the famous "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." The essence of this escape was that it offered a solution to the restless search within him in the idea of pre-existence. Wordsworth believes we have fallen from a superior state or condition and try to escape to that. The closest he can come to it is by recollection of his former greatness.

Wordsworth recollects that in his childhood

"such a holy calm  
Would overspread my soul, that bodily eyes  
Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw  
Appeared like something in myself, a dream,  
A prospect of the mind."<sup>12</sup>

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Quoted in J. C. Shairp, Studies in Poetry and Philosophy, p. 25.

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Quoted in Shairp, op. cit., p. 21.

Hence, in the "Ode" he tries to recall the glory of childhood-- as in the other poems--and then goes further. He glorifies the child as having in itself the fullness of its powers--which he, alas! has lost.

"The glory and the freshness of a dream  
It is not now as it hath been of yore;  
Turn whereso'er I may,  
By night or day,  
The things which I have seen I now can see no more." (ll. 5-9)

He glorifies the child: "Thou Soul's immensity," "Thou best Philosopher" "Mighty Prophet," "Seer Blest," The child coming from its pre-natal state of bliss has satiety, whereas man, the farther away he proceeds from childhood, must escape more and more from the intellectual maturity and consequent concern with reality. And where, to Wordsworth's mind, can escape be more satisfactory, than to recollections of childhood? Modern psychologists would probably call it the "sublimation" process. Nevertheless, it is Wordsworth in his second mood of escape led by Rousseau.

And further: "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence and I communed with all I saw as something, not apart from, but inherent in my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from the abyss of idealism to reality."<sup>13</sup>

Herford writes: "Wordsworth saw dim, mysterious openings into the unfathomable depth of things. The child becomes not merely the unstained creature, but "father of the man," the "hiding place of man's power."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>

Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>14</sup>

Age of Wordsworth, p. xxvi.

He is truly the "master in region where Imagination brings man nearer to the heart of reality by apparently deserting it."<sup>15</sup> His famous "Ode on Intimations of Immortality," as has been shown, illustrates this point, as well as the parts of The Prelude. Wordsworth does not yearn for the past of other climes or ages but of his own lost childhood and boyhood. In the remoteness of his own childhood, his imagination found relief from the complexity of life.

Seeking the glory and the dream, he cannot reconcile himself to present reality. He describes the "truths that wake to perish never." The last lines of the ode, critics indicate as reminiscent of Rousseau, and at the same time indicative of the naturalistic mysticism of Wordsworth.

"To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Hence, Wordsworth has idealized the child because "the soul of a child has immortal longings and ideal standards. These hunger for the right sense stimulation to evoke them, but they tell of 'Being past' and 'of the life to come' because they so far transcend the world of experience."<sup>16</sup> The ultimate need of escape is also given as the reason for inferring pre-existence and immortality for these are "inferred, because the mind is unwilling to forego, confess, submit, uneasy and unsettled-- hence belongs to an infinite order."<sup>17</sup>

In The Prelude, Book VIII, Wordsworth admits seeking recourse in the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. xxviii.

<sup>16</sup> M. Rader, Presiding Ideas in Wordsworth's Poetry, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

abyss of idealism in early childhood. In Book XII he writes

"I am lost, but see  
In childhood something of the base  
On which thy greatness stands; but this I feel  
That from thyself it comes, that thou must give  
Else never canst receive." (ll. 21-24)

However, Wordsworth goes deeper in his escape. "He viewed social problems, political issues, incidents of everyday life, and external nature, in the light of moral and spiritual principles....His mind reached outward to a horizon that is infinite and penetrated inward to a world that is spiritual."<sup>18</sup>

Through Nature's contact, the senses of Wordsworth "were informed by the soul and became spiritual."<sup>19</sup> Further they are sacred, are minister to what is highest in man," subservient still to moral purposes, auxiliar to divine. There was for him an unceasing ritual of sensible forms appealing to the heart, the imagination and the moral will."<sup>20</sup> The first edition of Lyrical Ballads contains poems of Wordsworth which embody the moral teaching received from Nature. It is divine-- because it attunes man to the highest law of morals, the law of love, by its "silent laws."

"Lines Composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey" synthesizes Wordsworth's conception of Nature as a moral influence. "He asserts that the nurture of his moral being is derived from the mystic influences of Nature, and .... he conceives Deity, not as a personal entity, but as an impersonal

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<sup>18</sup> Gingerich, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> E. Dowden, Studies in Literature, p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

Prescence."<sup>21</sup>

This significance of Nature to Wordsworth in its moral aspect is one of the strongest avenues for escape for the intellectual poet. Every "impulse from the vernal wood" and every "meanest flower that blows," Wordsworth valued not for itself alone, but because of that divine power inherent in Nature which was able to "build up our moral being." It then becomes suffused with a spiritual light, and man can "see into the life of things."

"Whether in his own self-revelations, or in his descriptions of the sensible creation, or in his delineations of men, he passed always from the surface to the center, from the outside looks to the inside character."<sup>22</sup> He thus escapes from the conventionality of the spirit and also its outward expression. Wordsworth believed that by escaping from this mundane world with its superficial living and thinking and consequent foibles he could "awaken healthful sensibilities in the heart, and a right state of intellect will be sure to follow."<sup>23</sup>

It is this "right state of intellect" that Wordsworth comes finally to pursue. From interest in escape from society, he shifts to escape from himself.

Paul Elmer More believes "low physical vitality and a troubled moral sense made Wordsworth seek ease of conscience in communion with a passive

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<sup>21</sup> Gingerich, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>22</sup> Shairp, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

unmoral nature."<sup>24</sup>

"I question things and do not find  
One that will answer to my mind;  
And all the world appears unkind."<sup>25</sup>

That Nature was a balm to him, Wordsworth attests:

"Oh! that I had a music and a voice  
Harmonious as your own, that I might tell  
What ye have done for me."<sup>26</sup>

It is this intellectual escapism that is reflected so definitely in his works.

"From his intellect  
And from the stillness of abstracted thought  
He sought repose."<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the poem of Wordsworth that is most often quoted by critics as a clear evidence of his escapist tendencies is "Tintern Abbey." Gates remarks that this is the poem where Wordsworth "bewails the unloveliness of ordinary human intercourse and grieves over the rash judgments; the sneers of selfish men and the greetings where no kindness is."<sup>28</sup> Rader presents the poem as transcendental escapism. Barry Cerf believes the complete poem is escapist. Wordsworth had that state of mind "which enables man by exercise of the supersensuous faculties to arrive at that spiritual peace by virtue of which he may escape from the oppressive sensations of the transitoriness of human

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<sup>24</sup> Shelbourne Essays, 7th Series, p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in More, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Richardson, op. cit., p. 339.

<sup>28</sup> Studies and Appreciations, p. 9.

beings, and perceive the unchanging, the eternal."<sup>29</sup> Hence, the poet, musing a few miles above Tintern Abbey, could write:

"I have felt  
A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
Of something far more deeply interfused....  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought  
And rolls through all things." (ll. 95-102)

Chronologically the poem traces the youthful stage of Wordsworth's escape through nature where he sought it for "its coarser pleasure." Then the aesthetic period follows in which he loved nature for the impressions of beauty that it yielded to him. And finally the religious and humanitarian stage develops in which he found in nature an inspiration to love humanity and to love God.

Brooke quotes copiously from "Tintern Abbey" to prove the mystical tendencies as a means of escape from a benighted world. Vaughn summarily analyzes and indicates the value of "Tintern Abbey" when he writes that "Wordsworth schooled himself to see into the life of things." It is this "deep power of joy which Wordsworth found in nature, and which he brought to nature" that makes his secret and his strength. It is this, as Coleridge saw, that gave "the strong music in his soul" and in the inspired movements of his utterance.

Rapidly, all philosophy, past and present, was failing him, and ultimately he comes to rest in the conviction that:

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<sup>29</sup>

B.Cerf, "Wordsworth's Gospel of Nature," PMLA Vol. XXXVII, p. 618.



"Our destiny, our nature and our home  
Is with infinitude and only there:  
With hope it is, hope that can never die,  
Effort and expectation and desire,  
And something evermore about to be."

The Prelude (Bk. VI, II 604-608)

In maturity and the final stage of his escape he is convinced that complete abandonment to Nature is his only sanctuary.

"One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good  
Than all the sages can."

"The Tables Turned" (ll. 21-24)

As Brooke remarks, the poet "sought refuge in nature because there was peace; it was the ineffable calm of God's existence."<sup>30</sup>

"Up the brook  
I roamed in the confusion of my heart  
Alive to all things and forgetting all.  
Under the quiet stars  
Listening to notes  
Thence did I drink the visionary power."

These moments were the origin of an ideal sublimity possible to the soul, to which with growing faculties, the soul aspires

"feeling still  
That whatsoever point they gain, they yet  
Have something to pursue."

Gradually, Wordsworth believes he is winning the ideal of intimate communion with nature, but---yet---

"Wake sometimes to a noble restlessness," .... where could he find peace?

Fausset writing in his thoroughly analytical book of Wordsworth's character, remarks in the preface:

"Unless we recognize in Wordsworth the spiritual man striving and ultimately failing to be born out of the natural man, we miss the real significance of his early fidelity to Nature and the real pathos of his later apostasy.

Wordsworth, was, in short, a potential mystic who failed to complete himself at a crucial point, failed to pass from the state of childhood and boyhood when the spiritual is inevitably a condition of the natural to a creative maturity when the natural should be as inevitably a condition of the spiritual."<sup>31</sup>

Wordsworth had attempted personal rehabilitation by escape to recollections of childhood, by pursuit of current and ancient philosophies, by strict adherence to his last hope--Nature. All fail him. He feels man is made for infinitude....Through Nature he would pursue that infinitude....

Weariness with the fluctuation and uncertainties of the past causes him to cry:

"Me this unchartered freedom tires:  
I feel the weight of chance-desires:  
My hopes no more must change their name,  
I long for a repose that ever is the same."

"Ode to Duty" (ll. 36-40)

He acknowledges that the "immortal mind craves objects that endure:

"These cleave to it, from these it cannot roam,  
Nor they from it; their fellowship is secure."<sup>32</sup>

Ultimately the "one interior life that lives in all things--this was the

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<sup>31</sup>  
The Lost Leader, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup>  
Cerf, op. cit., p. 626.

true reality,-- the ineffable unity." This brought Wordsworth to the mystical conception of reality that is at the close of his escape theme.

"Of ill advised Ambition and of Pride  
I would stand clear, but yet to me I feel  
That an internal brightness is vouchsafed."<sup>33</sup>

Wordsworth believed that all we see around us is alive, beating with the same life which pulsates in us. This is, of course, his transcendentalism.

"an obscure sense  
Of possible sublimity, whereto  
With growing faculties she doth aspire."<sup>34</sup>

As had already been noted Wordsworth goes farther, intellectually, than any other of the five poets in this discussion, in his escape through nature. This is now, only a stepping-stone to something higher. For him

"the wedding of imagination with this glorious universe.. is the secret of all wisdom, happiness, mortality and religion. To apprehend the world with the insight of love and holy passion, was to have visions more sublime than Erebus and Elysium, to be released from sensual impulse and vain frivolity; to have blessed consolations in distress, cheerfulness for acts of daily life, and peace which passeth understanding."<sup>35</sup>

Minor aspects of Wordsworth's escapism are his attempted, but unsuccessful escape to the past and his overthrow of poetic forms.

In the "White Doe of Rylstone" the glamour of feudal chivalry against the background of nature is an example of his escape into Medievalism. Wordsworth notes that this poem has often been compared to Sir Walter Scott's similar work, I presume, "The Lady of the Lake." However, the latter is

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<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Rader, op. cit., p. 139.

<sup>34</sup> C.F.E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature, p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> Herford, op. cit., p. 156.

far superior. In an abbey lives the Royal family. Feudal warfare and knightly jousts fill the story. The ultimate Wordsworthian conclusion is that the White Doe, Emily, finds mystic consolation in Nature-- and so escapes the tumultuous castle life. "Wordsworth has woven much of himself into this legend of Elizabethan days. He hopes that in turning to God to escape from the 'self-reliance of despair' he may yet retain his contact with nature."<sup>36</sup>

Other works of medieval escapist tendencies are "Hartleap Well" and "Brougham Castle." The first contains a picture of feudal times and of chivalrous romance. Wordsworth appends an inartistic moral tag: namely, never take pleasure in injuring beasts of the forests. "Brougham Castle" rings with the martial sound of knightly warfare. However, it, too, has the indelible mark of Wordsworth--the knight forsakes his arms for shepherd life!

Wordsworth himself remarks that he wanted to get away from the classical tendencies of the previous age. The glorious outburst of imaginative work is the result. His very definition of poetry: "A spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" is escapist. He is escaping from the rigidity of classical form, Spenserian stanza, the couplet, use of mythology and artificial modes of expressing sentiment--which were far from spontaneous: Not only feeling but powerful feeling is a far cry from the cold reasoning of the Augustan period. The contemplation of Nature alone for Wordsworth was the means of arousing feelings in him. As has been before intimated, his return

to Nature was an escape from the tawdriness of the town, "from the pressure of the ordinary-- a mode of deliverance from the dead weight of routine." Further than that, he indulges in nature until it becomes a personality for him, a Transcendental being, almost his God.

Wordsworth can be adequately discussed only in his escape from Reality into Nature and the philosophy he built up as a result. The past, neither of the Middle Ages, nor of classical antiquity, held any charm for him. His was a different, personal, egotistic past! To trace Wordsworth's escapism into nature has been the burden of this chapter. "He, who escaping through passionate love of Nature from self, looks straight into Nature and sees her as she is, beholds God not only as a personal, but as impersonal, not only as a human God, but as far beyond humanity!"<sup>37</sup>

It is to this that Wordsworth develops as an escapist.

### CHAPTER III

#### Coleridge: The Metaphysical Escapist.

Unique among the Romantic poets in which there is a tendency toward the escape theme is Coleridge. Coleridge was an escapist all his life. In fact, escapism seems to be the only satisfactory solution to his ever questing, never peaceful mind, and ever turbulent life. "The habit of escaping from the actual into the imaginary was to prove the one absolutely consistent, if pathological impulse, in a vacillating career."<sup>1</sup>

Fausset's book, Samuel T. Coleridge, is pointed out by commentators as an escape study. That it surely is for it traces the escape movement in Coleridge from childhood through all his diversified experiences. The book lacks scholarship and is therefore only a literary study and results in a rather personal, arbitrary portrayal of Coleridge's entire life and personality as escapist. I have consulted other authorities and those which do analyze the escapist movement, definitely and pointedly include Coleridge and certain of his poems.

Coleridge as an escapist went to the extreme. As Legouis writes in his History of English Literature, "Coleridge goes directly to the super-

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<sup>1</sup> H.I. Fausset, S.T. Coleridge, p. 16.

natural."<sup>2</sup> Everything is immediately transformed into a spiritual idealism.

A few introductory remarks from Fausset indicate how easily and naturally this condition came to him.

The effect of the early reading of the Arabian Nights on his mind was

"comparable to that which a narcotic or alcohol would have had upon his body. He would lie and mope, his brain crowded with alluring or sinister phantoms, his body tingling with sensations which cried out for physical expression, and then as the fantastic fever burned too fiercely for him to bear, his spirits would come upon him suddenly and in a flood and he would run up and down, cutting at weeds and nettles in a desperate striving after self-escape."<sup>3</sup>

Nature to the boy Coleridge was "tantalizing intangibility"--which led him to catch obscurely at

"The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language."<sup>4</sup>

"The clash and clamour of school only drove him further in, to emphasize his essential solitude."<sup>5</sup>

Unlike normal boys who do not have the aesthetic response to music, Coleridge escaped from the adventurous world at Christmas time on the notes of the carol and "was transported" in fancy to the fields of Bethlehem, and the song which was sung at that season by angels' voices to the shepherds."<sup>6</sup>

In adolescence he dwelt in the fantastic and yearned for the ideal. Be-

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<sup>2</sup>  
p. 1043.

<sup>3</sup>  
Fausset, op. cit., p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>  
Quoted in ibid., p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>  
Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>6</sup>  
Ibid., p. 23.

cause his knowledge had no sure foundation in sensuous experience and because too early in him, the metaphysical took root, his life-long hunger was for the infinite, his

"yearning to touch, to feel  
The dark Impalpable seer."<sup>7</sup>

He sought escape because he could not "reconcile his subjective vision and longings with the objective world about him. As in his human relations he hungered to resolve the conflict between self-absorption and sympathetic communion with his fellows, so in his consciousness he wished to escape from solitary fantasy by combining a visionary with a natural perception of things."<sup>8</sup> Definitely, and other critics bear out this statement, "the motive behind this strange metaphysical debauch was, like that which earlier plunged him into the miraculous, a desire for escape from an actuality which jarred; from

'the keen insult of the unfeeling heart,  
The dread dependence on the low-born mind,'

and in 'the sunny mist, the luminous gloom' of Plato he found a kindred spirit."<sup>9</sup>

As history repeats itself so also the philosophy of history runs strange parallels. Plato also sought escape. His was a time when warnings of disintegration of society were apparent and so to escape that catastrophe he urged men to unite themselves with a Being Who wholly transcended

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<sup>7</sup>  
Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>8</sup>  
Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>9</sup>  
Ibid., p. 33.



transient material things; to live in the idea of a Divine harmony, which was alien and unaffected by things of time but was of it itself Beauty, eternal, self-sufficient, indestructible.

So Coleridge was superbly satisfied to seek an immediate communion with Beauty, to dismiss nonchalantly all early considerations and so solve the problem by escaping into a land of pure intellect and perfection of goodness and truth and beauty. He went further. Through excess of sensibility he recoiled from the world outside, took flight within himself and built up his own metaphysical, imaginative reality.

Coleridge's affair with Mary Evans sent him praying for self-annihilation. Pining sensuousness, hope, despair, frenzy,--all these created moments of nostalgia when, fortunately for English Literature, he put down in a tangible form his exotic escapes into regions only his mind could conjure. To escape from the memory of Mary Evans he writes "Lewte"--

"At midnight by the stream I roved,  
To forget the form I loved,  
Image of Lewti is not kind."<sup>10</sup>

He sought escape again on the same subject in the poem, "The Sigh."

Like Wordsworth he turned his means of escape to Nature in the form of walking-tours. This led to a friendship with Southey which culminated in that well frenzied means of escape, that Pantisocratic dream--a Utopia on the banks of the Susquehanna in the land of milk and honey, America. Southey of course, was a bit more practical than Coleridge or even Wordsworth--so he thought--for he would not take refuge from the depravity of man in con-

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<sup>10</sup>

Ibid., p. 70.

ceptions of primeval innocence. Instead this Pantisocracy was the solution:

"Yet I will love to follow the sweet dream  
Where Susquehanna pours his untamed stream."<sup>11</sup>

"This was an enthusiasm which, taking fire from the fire of the world, made him think, in the hope and joy which filled his heart, that all things were possible to faith so strong and aspiration so intense."<sup>12</sup>

This scheme of Coleridge and Southey was concurrent with the times. Emancipation was difficult in the old world, and America was the land to which to escape, and start all over, just as in literature, logic was gone and imagination could start all over in its new escape and re-consecration. To Coleridge personally it meant "no less than a solution of a crying inner need, the reconciliation of the theoretical enthusiast in him and the real man, an escape from that solitary slavery to the abstract which was both his luxury and his torment."<sup>13</sup>

Two poems on this Pantisocracy expressed the vague longings of Coleridge to escape the throes of trouble; and they revealed the dream of Elisium he is anticipating.

His first is "Pantisocracy."

"No more my visionary soul shall dwell  
On joys that were; no more endure to weigh  
The shame and anguish of the evil day,  
Wisely forgetful. O'er the ocean swell  
I seek the cottaged dell." (ll. 1-5.)

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>12</sup> S.A. Brooke, Theology in the English Poets, p. 56.

<sup>13</sup> Fausset, op. cit., p. 87.

The entire poem "On the Prospect of Establishing a Pantisocracy in America" sums up Coleridge's dream of escape from political reality of the day.

"Whilst pale Anxiety, corrosive Care,  
The tear of Woe, the gloom of sad Despair,  
And deepen'd Anguish generous bosoms rend;--  
Whilst patriot souls their country's fate lament;  
Whilst mad with rage demoniac, foul intent,  
Embattled legions Despots vainly send  
To arrest the immortal mind's expanding ray  
Of everlasting Truth;-- I other climes  
Where dawns, with hope serene, a brighter day  
Than e'er saw Albion in her happiest times  
With mental eye exulting now explore,  
And soon with kindred minds shall haste to enjoy  
Free from the ills which here our peace destroy  
Content and Bliss on Transatlantic shore."

His escape from his unhappy union with Sarah Fricker is sought in the lines from "Domestic Peace."

"Tell me, on what holy ground  
May Domestic Peace be found?  
Halcyon daughter of the skies,  
Far on fearful wings she flies,  
From the pomp of Sceptered State,  
From the Rebel's noisy hate.  
In a cottag'd vale She dwells,  
Listening to the Sabbath bells!" (ll. 1-8)

"Religious Musings" draws from Coleridge condemnation of all mankind until the earth, rejuvenated, is completely re-embodied in the past family of Love,

"and forth come in fragments wild  
Sweet echoes of unearthly melodies,  
And odours snatched from beds of amaranthe." (ll. 347-349)

"Once again Coleridge was flying from a teasing world to drug himself

with strange beatitudes."<sup>14</sup>

"The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" does re-echo a bit of his own escape idea. His escape from the solitude of an abnormal self-consciousness is thus revealed:

"I pass, like night, from land to land,  
I have strange power of speech;  
That moment that his face I see,  
I know the man that must hear me;  
To him my tale I teach." (ll. 586-590)

Fausset believes it is Coleridge seeking relief throughout his life:--

"this soul hath been  
Alone on a wide, wide sea:  
So lonely 'twas, that God Himself  
Scarce seemed there to be." (ll. 596-600)

One critic has said that Wordsworth's aim in writing poetry was for interpretation; Coleridge's, that of refuge-- and "that fact made him ashamed of taking flight from a world of distress and discontent into that peculiar world of his own which was under a spell. It made him long for self-command when all his hopes of realizing his genius lay in self-surrender."<sup>15</sup>

Coleridge has sought escape from himself in the Elysium of a home, to heal his soul "sickening at the world".-- He feels the needs of a creed-- and to a small child who is imbedded by nature in Faith cries out:

"Still let me stretch my arms and cling to thee,  
Meek nurse of souls through their long infancy."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

As he wandered from Nature to Nature's God, - through all the philosophies of the day they were never concrete enough for him to embrace; he merely took temporary Sanctuary in them. His friendship with Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, gave him another temporary refuge in her.

From this we glean that Coleridge's escape from reality was a fantastic, spasmodic career. Two definite places of refuge do, however, present themselves, and these are Nature and Philosophy. Coleridge's was always "a moral nature" and therefore, obviously, philosophy ultimately was his refuge as one after another of his dreams faded. That will be considered lastly and the more transient place of refuge for him, Nature, will be considered first. Nature never meant to Coleridge what it did to Wordsworth. For the former it was only a means to an end, although a rather insecure one; whereas, for the latter it was the End Itself.

Coleridge writes in a letter of April, 1798:

"I love fields and words and mountains with an almost visionary fondness. And because I have found benevolence and quietness growing within me as that fondness increased, therefore I should wish to be the means of implanting it in others."<sup>17</sup>

What type of refuge, Nature was to him, he explains in "The Dungeon".

"With other ministrations thou, O Nature!  
Healst thy wandering and distemper'd child:  
Thou pourest on him thy soft influences,  
Thy sunny hues, fair forms, and breathing sweets,  
Thy melodies of woods, and winds and waters,  
Till he relent, and can no more endure  
To be a jarring and a dissonant thing,  
Amid this general dance and minstrelsy;  
But, bursting into tears, wins back his way,  
His angry spirit heal'd and harmoniz'd  
By the benignant touch of Love and Beauty." (ll. 20-30)

Although not as intellectually and passionately moved by the political turmoil of his day as Wordsworth was, Coleridge, nevertheless, because of his disillusionment in France's strike for freedom "took refuge in the solitudes of nature" and "declared with a certain impatient petulance, that he could only truly feel the spirit of freedom when he sent his being out of himself through earth and sea and air, and possessed 'All things with intensest love'."<sup>18</sup> More particularly Coleridge "flees to it when wearied of self-seeking and of the busy human-heart where passions and follies have exhausted him; and he hears in it a voice strange to him, but beautiful."<sup>19</sup>

In the "Hymn before Sun-Rise in the Vale of Chamouni" he attests his love and repose and peace found in Nature.

"O dread and silent Mount! I gazed on thee,  
Till thou, still present to the bodily sense,  
Didst vanish from my thought: entranced in prayer.  
I worshipped the Invisible alone." (ll. 13-16)

Nevertheless, Coleridge sees "eternal baffling" in nature. However it is "not in Nature but in his own mind, which felt the truth of evolution and refused to see it."<sup>20</sup>

Coleridge cannot agree with Wordsworth to find peace by escape through nature."<sup>21</sup> Thus in "Dejection: An Ode":

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<sup>18</sup> Brooke, op. cit., p. 58.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>20</sup> G.R. Potter, "Coleridge and the Idea of Evolution," PMLA, Vol. XL, p. 395.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in B. Cerf, "Wordsworth's Gospel of Nature," PMLA, Vol. XXXVII, p. 620.

"My genial spirits fail  
 And what can these avail  
 To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?  
 It were a vain endeavor  
 Though I should gaze forever  
 On that green light that lingers in the west:  
 I may not hope from outward forms to win  
 The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.....  
 (ll. 39-46)

And would we ought behold, of higher worth  
 Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
 To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd.  
 Oh! from the soul itself must issue forth  
 A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
 Enveloping the Earth --  
 And from the soul itself must then descend  
 A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,  
 Of all sweet sounds the life of element! (ll. 50-58)

To Coleridge visible things were

"steps, that upward to their Father's throne  
 Lead gradual, -- else nor glorified nor loved."

"He always secretly hoped to find in metaphysics, or even in transcendentalism, some revelations of supernatural things, though what this might turn out to be he scarce could tell, and thus to be supplied with arguments in support of Truth."<sup>22</sup> Fairchild seconds this statement when he writes concerning Coleridge's medievalism and that sense of escape that resolves itself into a transcendental attitude toward life:

"But it is evident that he was, as Carlyle says of Teufelsdröckh, 'a wonder-loving and wonder-seeking man.' In his desire to sense the spiritual reality of things beneath their material trappings he was receptive to whatever might justify his transcendental faith. Even the most primitive superstitions contained a prophetic

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<sup>22</sup> J. Charpentier, Coleridge, p. 292.

glimmer of the light that he sought."<sup>23</sup>

To achieve his goal, a philosophical satiety and a metaphysical Reality for the surface reality, Coleridge went, as did the other Romantic poets, to the philosophies of the world. The Platonists gave him his first inspiration and he tried to give such inspiration a cause for justification in reason itself. In this search he was led "through a veritable labyrinth of philosophical thoughts."<sup>24</sup> I go sounding on my dim and perilous way."<sup>25</sup> That "way" took him to Voltaire, Darwin, Hartley.

"Like Wordsworth and Shelley, he had followed Godwin for a time, but, keener, in philosophic vision, he sensed the vicious tendencies of his principles and discarded them. He had dismissed Hume summarily, had studied in the schools of Locke, Berkeley, Leibnitz, and Spinoza, and had no where found an abiding place for his reason."<sup>26</sup>

Mental and physical sufferings brought about a crisis in his life and he alludes to it in "Dejection: An Ode":

"There was a time when, though my path was rough,  
This joy within me dallied with distress,  
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff  
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:  
.....  
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:  
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;  
But oh! each visitation  
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,  
My shaping Spirit of Imagination." (ll. 76-86)

He goes to the German idealists to escape from this intellectual quandry. One

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., p. 300.

<sup>24</sup> Sister M. Eunice Rasin, Evidences of Romanticism, p. 60.

<sup>25</sup> Biographia Literaria, Vol. I, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Rasin, op. cit., p. 63.



by one, Schelling, Fichte, Kant, were his refuges in that search for "the faculty by means of which these realities [God, freedom, the soul and immortality<sup>7</sup>] might be apprehended as he believed the mystics to have apprehended them."<sup>27</sup>

The search for the absolute is the signification of escapism in Coleridge's life. Nothing better than the Biographia Literaria need be quoted to show this. In Chapter I he writes: "At a very premature age, even before my fifteenth year, I had bewildered myself in metaphysics, and in theological controversy."<sup>28</sup> He quotes lines from Paradise Lost to indicate his favorite topics of conversation--in boyhood!

"Of providence, fore-knowledge, will, and fate,  
Fixed fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute,  
And found no end in wandering mazes lost." (II, ll. 559-60)

Later he says: "In after time I have sought a refuge from bodily pain and mismanaged sensibility in abstruse researches, which exercised the strength and subtlety of the understanding without awakening the feelings of the heart."<sup>29</sup>

Coleridge opens Chapter IX with the query: "After I had successively studied in the schools of Locke, Berkeley, Leibnitz, and Hartley, and could find in none of them an abiding place for my reason, I began to ask myself; is a system of philosophy, as different from mere history and historic

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Biographia Literaria, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

classification possible? If possible, what are its necessary conditions?"<sup>30</sup>

All this questing is only the "Gradus ad Parnassum" to the ultimate, metaphysical flight from which was to evolve the distinction between Fancy and Imagination; Reason and Understanding. Imagination is the creative power; Fancy is the seat of association and of modification of impressions from the memory. Reason according to Coleridge is superior to the Understanding. It functions by intuition while the Understanding functions by rationalization. He concludes:

"The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the external act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-exists with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in the degree and in the mode of its operation..... Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy indeed is no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association."<sup>31</sup>

Here is Coleridge, the metaphysical escapist, secure at last in a transcendental refuge, built up from his questings on abstractions of Imagination, and Memory, Fancy and Understanding.

In his philosophic and religious quest, Coleridge did finally reach the mystical extreme of transcendentalism, yet he could not quite

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

"surrender the descendent longing of the romanticist. His mystical vision becomes entangled with the facts of the external world. The reign of Coleridge's reason begins with contemplation of the godhead, but it soon extended until it suffuses with its mysterious light 'the constitution of the church and state,' politics, social and economic problems, literary criticism."<sup>32</sup>

And so his escape is left unfinished because it was the normal fate of everything to which he put his hand. But in this case it may well be that the superhuman effort to escape from the trivial round of romance, as trodden by these and other writers, proved too great a burden even for the genius which had conceived and perfected "The Ancient Mariner."<sup>33</sup>

The one sure refuge for Coleridge and the salvation of his poetic career would have been Scholastic philosophy as he himself no doubt realized when he wrote:

"The whole of religion seems to me to rest on and in one question -- The One and The Good -- are these words or realities? I long to read the schoolmen on the subject."<sup>34</sup>

With Carlyle we leave Coleridge, the escapist, a poet on the brow of Highgate Hill

"looking down on London and its smoke-tumult, like a sage escaped from the inanity of life's battle; attracting towards him the thoughts of innumerable brave souls still engaged there. A sublime man; who, alone in those dark days had saved his crown of spiritual manhood; escaping from the black materialism and revolutionary deluges with "God, Freedom and Immortality" still his: a king of men..... His life had been an abstract thinking and dreaming, idealistic, passed amid the ghosts of defunct bodies and of unborn ones. The moaning singsong of that theosophico-

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Fairchild, op. cit., p. 347.

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C.E. Vaughn, The Romantic Revolt, p. 57.

34

E. H. Coleridge, (ed.) Anima Poetae, p. 53.

metaphysical monotony left you at last, a very drear feeling."<sup>35</sup>

Summarily, Coleridge's search throughout his life was after the absolute, and absolute not only in thought but in all human relations, in love, friendship, faith in man, faith in beauty. And while it was this profound dissatisfaction with less than the perfect form of every art, passion, thought, or circumstance that set him adrift in life, making him seem untrue to duty, conviction and himself, it was also this which formed in him the double existence of poet and philosopher, each supplementing and interpenetrating the other.

In Coleridge, metaphysics joined with an unbounded imagination, in equal flight from reality and from the notions of time and space. Each was an equal denial of the reality of what we call real things: the one experimental, searching, reasoning; the other "a shaping spirit of imagination," an embodying force. "His sight was always straining into the darkness."<sup>36</sup>

Of this futile escapist straining into the darkness Shelley writes:

"He was a mighty poet -- and  
A subtle- soul'd psychologist  
All things he seem'd to understand  
Of old or new -- of sea or land --  
But his own mind -- which was a mist."

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<sup>35</sup>

Quoted in Fairchild, op. cit., p. 347, ff.

<sup>36</sup>

A. Symons, The Romantic Movement in English Poetry, 129, ff.

## CHAPTER IV

### Shelley: the Soaring Escapist

Undoubtedly of the major Romantic poets Shelley personifies the best in escapist tendencies. His escape was from all things earth-born: man, society, tradition, convention. He had refuge in idealism, in the imagination-- even beyond that. His song is concerned wholly with the future. Furthermore, when his song concerned himself and his interest in the present he did not live upon the earth at all.

"Shelley is more purely lyrical, more a singing creature than Wordsworth. His was the nature of the wild indweller of the sky who is born to sing and die in the upper air."<sup>1</sup> That is the theme of his personal escape-- the escape that he planned for himself. In his plans of escape for the world from the political and social chaos in which it was steeped, Shelley stood apart and viewed it objectively. When he sang of men, he sang of them "as he hoped they would be rather than as they are."<sup>2</sup> That he had a definite political and social regeneration and escape for man will be shown later in the chapter.

"Of all the great Romantics, Shelley was the least interested in the world as it actually was or as it had been in the

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<sup>1</sup> S.A. Brooke, Naturalism in English Poetry, p. 173.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

historic past....He tried to stand, as he himself said, upon a promontory and to descry what lay in the far distance. Even when he wrote of the present or the past, it was chiefly to disclose what forces had hindered the coming of a better day and what forces would hasten its arrival."<sup>3</sup>

What is, then, the signification of the escape theme in Shelley? He is the climax of it! He would escape not from one particular thing as in Wordsworth or the others but from all. Down the "arches of the years" or "down the labyrinthine ways of his own mind"--wherever impulse would lead--there would he flee--

"without questioning himself or it....The object he longed for was some abstract, intellectualized spirit of beauty and loveliness, which should thrill his spirit, unceasingly, with delicious shocks of emotions....This yearning, panting desire is expressed by him in a thousand forms and figures throughout his poetry. Again and again this yearning recurs:

"I pant for the music which is divine,  
My heart in its thirst is a dying flower;  
Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine  
Loosen the notes in a silver shower,  
Like a herbless plain for the gentle rain  
I grasp, I faint, till they wake again.

Let me drink the spirit of that sweet sound,  
More, o more! I am thirsting yet;  
It loosens the serpent which care has bound  
Upon my heart to stifle it:  
The dissolving strain, thru every vein,  
Passes into my heart and brain."<sup>4</sup>

He seeks real intellectual and emotional delight--"the mental thrill, the glow of...transcendental rapture....His hungry craving was for intellectual beauty, and the delight it yields."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> E. Bernbaum, Guide and Anthology of Romanticism, Vol. I, p. 381.

<sup>4</sup> J.C. Shairp, Aspects of Poetry, p. 199.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

To escape from reality and the chaotic present condition of things he would seek not only Equality, Fraternity and Liberty but Perfection for all mankind. Before nothing would he bow, but would pierce all mystery, all intellectual hindrances. He would strip the veil from all mystery and pierce into the reality of things!

From Lucretius to Hume, to Godwin to Plato he sped trying to find escape from mystery and to find satiety. Here is truly the poet of aspiration. All his experiences as revealed in his poetry are still unattained--something distant or future.

His is

"The desire of the moth for the star  
Of the night for the morrow,  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow."

That devotion "to something afar" was an avenue of escape encouraged by Lucretius in his philosophy of materialism; then Hume, declaring atoms are only impressions, gave Shelley a phantom world. This mode of thinking culminated in Plato where he found a Spirit of Beauty to worship, as his elegy, "Adonais" bears witness:

"That light whose smile kindles the universe  
That beauty in which all things work and move,  
That benediction which the eclipsing curse  
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining love  
Which, through the web of being blindly wove  
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,  
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of  
The fire for which all thirst." (Stanza LIV)

"Shelley's first chief teacher to whom he owed much insight and more tragedy is Godwin. His last, to whom he owed all consolation, the reconciliation of reason and imagination, and the free expression of himself, is

Plato. Between these came the English empiricists, under whose influence he professes to have developed his peculiar form of idealism."<sup>6</sup>

It seems expedient to develop the philosophical background of Shelley's career, since it is vitally connected with his poetry. Before tracing the escape theme in his lyrical productions, it seems he himself believed that poetry "becomes the finding for ideal reality through the interpretation of impressions received from Nature,"<sup>7</sup> but ultimately it comes to mean more than that as shall be illustrated. Moreover, Shelley admits that he adopted the opinions of the philosophers to escape from the materialism into which he had fallen by reaction from the "shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter."<sup>8</sup> Hence, it is evident that the philosophy of the ages of the world held no surcease for Shelley.

In early youth, Shelley's precocity coupled with Godwin's influence through his doctrines of individualism and perfectibility fostered the independence of the youth and the desire for a soul-satisfying Beauty. Witness of this is in his poem, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty".

"While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped  
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,  
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing  
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.  
I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed;  
I was not heard--I saw them not--  
When musing deeply on the lot  
Of life, at that sweet time when winds are wooing  
All vital things that wake to bring

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<sup>6</sup> A.E. Powell, The Romantic Theory of Poetry, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 194.



News of birds and blossoming,--  
 Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;  
 I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy! (ll. 49-60)

Stovall believes that early in life there was a conflict between desire and restraint, that all his life Shelley was pursuing the fantastic, and that his escape from life and its consequent quest took on a strange form. Scientifically, he might escape. He

"pored over ancient books of magic, brewed strange liquors, he speculated on death and the life beyond.... All this, however, passed with youth and the glory and the mystery had departed forever and his yet unsatiated mind sought elsewhere the excitement that it craved."<sup>9</sup>

An intellectual escape similiar to that of Coleridge's held him in thrall for a period. Godwin caused him to dream of a perfect world where society would be so perfect that church and state could be dispensed with. Love would rule. Reason later seemed to relieve him and free him. Before 1814 there was the struggle of reason against faith, free opinion against dogma, and heart against mind.

He had read Lucretius, Bacon, Spinoza. As late as 1815 he was pre-eminently a child of eighteenth century thought. "Rousseau and Voltaire and the French Perfectibilitarians, Hume, Berkeley, Godwin and Locke had done the most to determine the bent of his mind."<sup>10</sup>

"Beauty is the finite rendering of the infinite," Schelling says, and Shelley, finding naught in philosophy to satisfy, escapes to rendering of the

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<sup>9</sup> F. Stovall, Desire and Restraint in Shelley, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> H.L. Hoffman, An Odyssey of the Soul, p. 6.

Eternal Beauty that he unconsciously is seeking. Shelley himself admits that

"man is a being of high aspiration, looking before and after, whose thoughts wander through eternity, disdain-  
ing alliance with transience and decay; incapable of  
imagining to himself annihilation; existing but in the  
future and the past; being not what he is but what he  
has been and shall be. Whatever may be his true and  
final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity  
with nothingness and dissolution."<sup>11</sup>

Shelley's next refuge from disillusionment in philosophy was within  
his own soul, its impressions and experiences. Out of the immaterial sub-  
stance of his mind, he created poetry. He sought surcease from the  
realities of life through the imagination "where through poetry all things  
might be made perfect."<sup>12</sup>

Shelley recreated in his poetry the circumstances and conflicts of his  
own experience. The reaction to this invariably drove him for consolation  
away from the actual world with its imperfections and disappointments.<sup>13</sup>  
The dominant tone of his poetry is his escape from reality to seek the  
beautiful. As Kurtz analyzes, in a social sense, it is the pursuit of a  
panacea; in an individual sense, it is the flight from the world to a se-  
questered beauty.

"However, the despair of finding any embodiment  
for his own ideal, of bridging the gulf fixed be-  
tween the actual world of sin, sorrow and stupidity  
and the transcendental world of joy, love and pure  
reason, represents the final outcome of Shelley's  
imperfect philosophy and gives the theme of its most

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted from Shelley in Hoffman, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Stovall, op. cit., p. 237.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Ibid., p. 153.

exquisite poetry. The doctrine symbolized in "Alastor" the history of the poet who has seen in a vision a form of perfect beauty, and dies in despair of ever finding it upon the earth, is the clue to the history of his own intellectual life. He is the happiest when he can get away from the world altogether into a vague region, having no particular relation to time or space, to the valleys haunted by the nymphs of the 'Prometheus'; of the Mystic land of 'Epipsychidion' where all sights and sounds are as a background of a happy dream, fitting symbols of sentiments too impalpable to be fairly grasped in language; or that 'calm and blooming cove' of the lines of the 'Euganean Hills.'

The lyrics are but so many different modes of giving utterance to

The desire of the moth for the star,  
Of the night for the morrow,  
The devotion to something afar  
From the sphere of our sorrow.

"The song of the skylark suggests to him that we are doomed to 'look before and after, and to pine for what is not.' The wild commotion in the sea, sky and earth which heralds the approach of the south wind harmonizes with his dispirited restlessness, and he has to seek refuge in the vague hope that his thoughts, be prophetic of a magical transformation of the world."<sup>14</sup>

The "magical transformation of the world" is built up, mosaic-like, in many of his lyrics. Beach mentions outstanding Shelleyan lyrics which contribute to his escape from reality and from himself. "Alastor" symbolizes nature, which to the oversensitive soul of the poet, furnishes a retreat from the cruelty and misunderstanding of the world. Mount Blanc is the sublime mountain,

"the secret strength of things,  
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome  
Of heaven is as law."

"The West Wind" suggests the "variegated power of natural phenomena and nature's promise of a world reborn to a spirit desolated by the wintry bleakness of the present. The "Cloud" denotes the essential oneness of nature amid her manifold changes of form. "To a Skylark" is indicative of the gladness of nature's creatures who are free "from Hate, and Pride and Fear which sadden and cloud the spirit of man."<sup>15</sup>

However, one cannot read far into Shelley without becoming aware of the sadness that inevitably follows his loftiest flights. This is particularly evident in his lyrics. "It is as though, when the strong gush of emotion had spent itself, there was no more behind, nothing to fall back upon, but blank emptiness and desolation."<sup>16</sup> As Carlyle says, "his cry is like the infinite inarticulate wailing of forsaken infants."<sup>17</sup>

After the ecstatic flight in the lyric, "To a Skylark," we read:

"We look before and after  
And pine for what is not:  
Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught.  
.....  
Our sweetest songs are those that  
tell of saddest thought." (ll. 84-90)

Similarly in the "Ode to the "West Wind" he begs for escape through nature.

"Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed  
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed  
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

<sup>15</sup> cf. The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry, p.209.

<sup>16</sup> Shairp, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies  
 Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,  
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
 My spirit! Be thou, me, impetuous one! (ll. 54-63)

The poem "Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples" culminates this brief analysis of Shelley's lyrics of escapism. It reveals his attempted escape from the cares of life.

"Alas! I have not hope nor health,  
 Nor peace within nor calm around,  
 Nor that content surpassing wealth  
 The sage in meditation found,  
 And walked with inward glory crowned--  
 Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.  
 Others I see whom these surround-- (ll. 19-25)

Skimming Shelley's escape poetry it is easily seen that he is haunted by the fancy that if he could only get at the One, the eternal Idea, in complete aloofness from the Many, from life with all its change, decay, struggle, sorrow and evil, he would have reached the true object of poetry: as if the whole finite world were a mere mistake of illusion, the sheer opposite of the Infinite One, and in no way or degree its manifestation.<sup>18</sup> In "Julian and Maddalo" he writes:

"I love all waste  
 And solitary places; where we taste  
 The pleasure of believing what we see  
 Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be." (ll. 14-17)

Several lyrics are very significant in this escape consideration and so will be analyzed separately. The first is "Alastor."

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A.C. Bradley, English Association Leaflets, p. 14.

"Alastor" embodies a "tameless spirit to whom beauty presented itself as yet only in an impalpable dream." Shelley writes in the Preface to the poem that "among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender-hearted perish through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities, when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt."<sup>19</sup>

The poem is autobiographical of Shelley's own escape. As we read, we are borne on the tameless, restless, resistless passion of escape. Although written in the third person, the "Poet" is too obviously Shelley. He confesses in the introduction that he has made his abode with Nature,

"Hoping to still these obstinate questionings  
Of thee and thine by forcing some lone ghost,  
Thy messenger, to render up the tale  
Of what we are." (ll. 26-29)

Then the long search of the Poet pursuing the shadow of Nature's secret ways begins. From Nature he wanders to the "awful ruins of the days of old": Athens, Tyre, Jerusalem, Babylon, Memphis, Thebes. Love passes him by, until in a dream he asks:

"Whither have fled  
The hues of heavens that canopied his bower  
Of yesternight?" (ll. 197-199)

He eagerly pursues beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade. The Dream of Love has entered as the means of escape and eagerly does he try to grasp at it.

"As an eagle grasped  
In the fold of the green serpent, feels her breast  
Burn with the poison, and precipitates

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<sup>19</sup> Oxford Ed. The Complete Poetical Works of Shelley, Hutchinson (editor)  
p. 15.

Through night and day, tempest and calm, and cloud,  
 Frantic with dizzying anguish, her blind flight  
 O'er the wide ~~very~~ wilderness: thus driven  
 By the bright shadow of that lovely dream  
 Beneath the cold glare of the desolate night,  
 Through tangled swamps and deep precipitous dells  
 Startling with careless step the moonlight snake,  
 He fled." (ll. 226-236)

Worn out by his quest but, "Calm, he still pursued." He feels death and futility upon him. Disillusionment he dreads but the Vision of Love has eluded him.

The futility of Shelley's escape to Love and Beauty is strongly indicated in the last lines:

"Art and eloquence  
 And all the shows o' the world are frail and vain  
 To weep a loss that turns their lights into shade.  
 It is a woe 'too deep for tears' when all  
 Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,  
 Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves  
 Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,  
 The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;  
 But pale despair and cold tranquility,  
 Nature's vast frame, the web of human things,  
 Birth and grave, that are not as they were." (ll. 710-20)

Many critics agree that this poem is the search for the ideal mate, to mitigate his useless escape from the disappointing society. The futility of this they, too, admit for R.D. Havens concludes that in spite of his escape, Shelley "lived, he died, he sung in solitude--in physical as well as spiritual solitude."<sup>20</sup> Bradley makes futility of the dream--just another avenue of escape for Shelley--to seek the prototype of what he visioned. Spurgeon suggests that the hero does not even notice the maid because he believes he is in quest of higher things. She believes Shelley is "always

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<sup>20</sup> "Shelley's Alastor," PMLA, Volume ILV, p. 1098.

searching for love"--but confounded human and divine love."<sup>21</sup>

I believe this poem is the pagan version of the supreme escape poem of all literature, "The Hound of Heaven," by Thompson. Here too, the poet is attempting to escape from the source of Beauty and Truth and Goodness by trying to find it in Nature, in the stars, in children, in the heart of the love of man--until he also, shattered, finds satiety. He is unlike Shelley's "Poet" who finds only futility because of the ultimate reason. Protestant England hedged him off from the Real Vision of Faith!

Concisely, the evil, unlovely world drove the poet for satisfaction to feel and to know "all of the great and good and lovely." Then the imperfect world which he found drove him into solitude; that consequent loneliness made the Poet thirst for perfect being and finding none, he surrenders his quest in defeat.

Probably the poet himself, indicates the real significance aside of the allegory and the externalizing of the desires of the mind when he succinctly heads the poem, after the explanatory preface, with the words from the Confessions of St. Augustine:

"Nondum amabam, et amare amabam, quaerebam quid amarem, amans amare."

Epipsychidion is another poem of escape to Beauty. Of it, Shelley writes:

"It's an idealized history of my life and feelings. I think one is always in love with something or other; the error, and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it, consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Cf. C.E. Spurgeon, Mysticism in English Literature, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Peck, Shelley: His Life and Works, Volume I, p. 421.



"Epipsychidion", of course, idealized his meeting with Emilia Viviani, "Emilia, beautiful, spiritual, sorrowing, became for him a type, the symbol of all that is most radiant and divine in nature, all that is most remote and unattainable, yet ever to be pursued -- the ideal of beauty, truth and love."<sup>23</sup> The poem is a reflection and embodiment of Shelley's version of the doctrine of Platonic love, which treats "love as a purely spiritual passion devoid of all sensuous pleasure."<sup>24</sup>

"We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness....The discovery of its antitype; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own...with a frame whose nerves like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own...this is the invisible and unattainable point to which love tends."<sup>25</sup>

"Epipsychidion" traces his escape through his several human loves.

"Then from the caverns of my dreamy youth,  
I sprang, as one sandalled with plumes of fire,  
And towards the lodestar of my one desire,  
I flitted, like a dizzy moth, whose flight  
Is as a dead leaf's in the owlet light" (ll. 216-220)

His final meeting with Emilia, his ideal is portrayed:

"Say, my heart's sister, wilt thou sit with me?  
Our bark is an albatross whose nest  
Is a far Eden of the purple East:  
And we between her wings will sit, while Night,  
Our ministers along the boundless Sea,  
Treading each other's heels, unheededly. (ll. 586-591)

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in D.J. McDonald, The Radicalism of Shelley and Its Sources, p. 68.

<sup>24</sup> J.S. Harrison, Platonism in English Poetry, p. 104.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in McDonald, op. cit., p. 66.

Like all of Shelley's poetry of escape, the refrain comes back:

"The winged words on which my soul would pierce  
 Into the height of Love's rare Universe,  
 Are chains of lead around its flight of fire--  
 I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!" (ll. 586-591)

Other love lyrics of the same theme are various. In "A Letter to Maria Gisborne" Shelley writes:

".....and how we spun  
 A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun  
 Of this familiar life which seems to be  
 But is not:--or is but quaint mockery  
 Of all we would believe, and sadly blame  
 The jarring and inexplicable frame  
 Of this wrong world." (ll. 153-160)

Shelley's other dominant way of escape was his never-ceasing quest for abstract Beauty. Besides seeking Beauty externalized in woman he voices this desire for a contemplated Beauty in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":

Spirit of Beauty.....  
 .....  
 .....where art thou gone?  
 Why dost thou pass away and leave our state,  
 This dim, vast vale of tears, desolate?  
 .....  
 Why aught should fail and fade that once is shown,  
 Why fear and dream and death and birth  
 Cast on the daylight of this earth  
 Such gloom,--why man has such a scope  
 For love and hate, despondency and hope?" (ll. 13-24)

His consecration to Beauty and his trust that she will rectify the world comes in the following:

"I vowed that I would dedicate my powers  
 To thee and thine, - have I not kept my vow?  
 .....  
 They know that never joy illumined my brow  
 Unlinked with hope that thou wouldst free  
 This world from its dark slavery, -  
 That thou, O awful Loveliness,  
 Wouldst give what e'er these words cannot express." (ll. 62-71)

The last poem of his life summarizes the futility of his personal escape. Ironically, "The Triumph of Life" traces the flight of a spirit-soul, presumably Shelley's, through a dark, intangible Phantom-world. Here also is unrest. Shelley seeks the fulfillment of his last quest: "What is Life?" In the pre-natal state, as one spirit tells him, is some of the lost joy for which all are seeking. Finally he questions this Spirit:

"Show whence I came, and where I am and why." (l. 398)

The spirit of Love is the only form of surcease in this quest because

"All things are transfigured except Love." (l. 476)

Shelley then sees as he had written in the Preface to "Alastor":

"That power which strikes the luminaries of the world with sudden darkness and extinction, by awakening them to too exquisite a perception of its influences, dooms to a slow and poisonous decay those mean spirits that dare to abjure its dominion... They who... keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse. They languish, because none feel with them their common nature. They are morally dead. They are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country."<sup>26</sup>

Hence in despair Shelley closes the poem with a cry:

"Then what is life?"

Dr. Garnett has found these additional lines in a manuscript to answer the final question of Shelley's:

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Peck, op. cit., vol. II, p. 277.

"The cripple cast  
 His eye upon the car, which now had rolled  
 Onwards, as if that look must be the last  
 And answered, 'Happy those for whom the gold  
 Of -----!'"

Peck analyzes this as indicating that for those for whom the possessions and power of the world mean nothing,-- to them alone is the meaning of Life made explicable, because in accordance with Shelley's doctrine, they live by Love alone.

A similar tone is noted in "Adonais" when Shelley exclaims:

"Whence are we and why are we?" (l. 184)

In this elegy his speculations give way to religion.

"No swift flight of lyric ecstasy, it is the swelling of strain after strain of solemn music, each one more charged than the last with 'immortal longings', -- until the benediction of sustaining Love descends in the great climax."<sup>27</sup>

Once more there is the recurrent theme of Shelley's pursuit of the Spirit.

"It is a yearning which strikes away from earthly personality, from the 'world's bitter wind,' and from the process of natural decay, but falls short of real devotion to that immortality which is at once the most organic and most peaceful life of the human spirit. Essentially, it is a yearning for a sort of perpetual trance, as of a being suspended between time and eternity, oblivious of its utter solitude,"<sup>28</sup>

Shelley approaches the Idea of a unifying Force when in the fifty-second stanza he writes:

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<sup>27</sup> G. Slaughter, "P.B. Shelley" N.A. Rev. Vol. CCXVI, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> G.R. Elliott,--The Cycle of Modern Poetry, p. 23.

"The One remains, the many change and pass;  
 Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly;  
 Life, like a dome of many colored glass,  
 Stains the white radiance of Eternity."

Shelley's escaping spirit flagged near 1821 in its quest of the Ideal and the Beautiful in

"some world far from ours,  
 Where music and moonlight and feelings are one."

Peck remarks on these lines from "To Jane: The keen stars were twinkling:"

"The Quest of the 'Romantic Revival' for an escape was never more perfectly epitomized than in these lines. It was the hope and the dream of the poets; and Shelley sought its reality more ardently, perhaps than any other. But by 1822 he had found that that Beauty has no earthly counterpart."<sup>29</sup>

Shelley's plans of escape for man and the world are also expressed in his poetry. From earliest youth a means of escape for the world had attracted him. In 1792 Shelley came into a world where the French Revolution was raging in political circles. In the literary world, the Gothic novel with its sense of the lurid held away. Later school life for Shelley was only

"a harsh and grating strife  
 Of tyrants and of foes."

With this childhood and adolescent background, Shelley decides to dedicate his wife:

"So, without shame I spoke: - I will be wise  
 And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies  
 Such powers, for I grow weary to behold  
 The selfish and the strong still tyrannize  
 Without reproach or check,"

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<sup>29</sup> Peck, op. cit., pp. 279-280.

At Oxford Shelley rebelled against Christianity, its dogma, its restrictions.

The poems, "Euganean Hills," "Hellas," "Queen Mab," and "Prometheus Unbound" trace the escape Shelley planned for a depraved world and fallen man. In "Queen Mab" is Shelley's dream for regenerated man:

"How sweet a scene will earth become!  
Of purest spirit, a pure dwelling place;  
Symphonious with the planetary spheres;  
When man, with changeless Nature coalescing,  
Will undertake regeneration's work." (VI. ll. 39-43)

"Euganean Hills" is a wan cry for the intellectual ideal that has been squandered because of man's inhibitions. Consequently, souls are fleeing in the sea of Live Agony, searching for the spirit of mild brotherhood, "to make the earth grow young again."

The closing chorus of the poem, "Hellas," which was written for the Greek War of Independence, is a glorious prophecy of a future world.

But in his vision intrudes the thought:

"Oh! Cease! Must hate and death return?  
Cease! Must men kill and die?  
Cease! Drain not its dregs the urn  
Of bitter prophecy.  
The world is weary of the past,  
Oh, might it die or rest at last!" (ll. 1096-1101)

Shelley's personal notes on the interpretation prove adequately his dream of a Utopia of intellectual peace issuing from its immediate cause, a world in which strife and sin and misery are aliens. He writes on the interpretation of his work:

"The concluding verses indicate a progressive state of more or less exalted existence according to the degree of intelligence which every distinct intelligence may have attained. .. as it is the province of the poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and enoble humanity, let him be permitted to have conjectured

the condition of that futurity towards which we are all impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality. Until better arguments can be produced, this desire itself must remain the strongest and only presumption that eternity is the inheritance of every thinking being."<sup>30</sup>

White contends Shelley's master passion was "a passion for reforming the world." One could reform by escaping the throes of convention and society, and by demolishing them. Poetry, Shelley thought, was a means to do this. Furthermore, it was to Shelley, and ought to be to all men "the great enlightener of the human spirit, a force which lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world."<sup>31</sup>

Shelley's "thirst for Intellectual Beauty and the desire to free oneself and the world, from evil and ignorance were really one and the same thing. That is why in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty", Shelley describes his youthful awakening to a sense of mission as a devotion to Intellectual Beauty, and in the prefatory poem to the Revolt of Islam describes it as the beginning of a crusade against tyranny."<sup>32</sup> In Asia of Prometheus Unbound Shelley limns the shadow of beauty unbeheld-- again identifying her as the approximate impersonation of that Intellectual Beauty and Love.

The thesis of this new biography of Shelley by White is that Shelley was a revolutionary, but a revolutionary in the sense of escapist. He revolted and rebelled because social bonds irked him. Conventions annoyed; laws antagonized. To escape from all this, Shelley became a confirmed

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<sup>30</sup> Stovall, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>31</sup> N.I. White, Shelley, II, p. 432.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 444.

revolutionary. White, probably more than any other critic and biographer of Shelley elucidates this point. His sole contention is that the philosophy of Shelley is centered around revolution. That is true. Yet Shelley's revolution, tracing it still further, is not for the sake of revolution alone--but as escape from the throes of life, in the hope of a happier future.

Ultimately, it all resolves itself into an escape.

After 1815, Shelley shifts philosophically, realizing that his revolutionary doctrines and positions are not so "soul-satisfying." These shifts were "an escape from an untenable position."<sup>33</sup>

Cursorily glancing over his turbulent career,

"Shelley had never in life fully accepted reality for what it seemed to be. As a boy he had sought in various ways to escape its dullness and oppression. As a youth he had vowed war against some of its aspects, and as a young man he had vigorously prosecuted his warfare."<sup>34</sup>

He wrote to Peacock after finishing Act I of Prometheus Unbound:

"I always seek in what I see the manifestation of something beyond the present and tangible object."<sup>35</sup>

Shelley's more definite ideas for world reform are expressed when he writes: "Government can have no rights, it is a delegation for the purpose of securing them to others."<sup>36</sup> Further he notes to Hogg, "Man is equal, and I am convinced that equality will be attendant on a more advanced and amel-

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<sup>33</sup>  
Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>34</sup>  
Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>35</sup>  
Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>36</sup>  
Peck, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 236.



iorated state of society."<sup>37</sup>

His poetry bears this stamp, especially "Queen Mab". Shelley believed that the cause of much unhappiness was that "the most fatal error that ever happened in the world was the separation of political and ethical science, that politics were morals comprehensively enforced."<sup>38</sup>

The reading of Godwin's Political Justice and Shelley's friendship with the author only stabilized his politically revolutionary ideas. With Godwin and the French materialists he built up a new political order with no reference to past historical evolutions or connections. Politics, according to Godwin, and fully endorsed by Shelley, should not be governed by expediency but by justice. The two evils of society are religion and government. There is error because there is social institution. Political government has caused the vices of mankind.

There can be no prosecution of evil acts because men act through necessity. All law, order, authority, religion must be ruthlessly eliminated. Instead the apotheosis of the individual takes place. Further, Anarchy, Tyranny, Priesthood must be abolished before the triumph of Liberty. Chaos ruled under the former. Peace and Love will succeed the latter. Shelley's "Ode to Liberty" closes with the picture of the void universe free from an all superior, ruling Power. Prometheus Unbound is an allegorical picture of the triumph of Love. According to Shelley, evil in the prevalent scheme of society was not something to be tolerated as inherent in it, but an accident that must be expelled.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 237.

<sup>38</sup> A. Clutton-Brock, Shelley the Man, p. 56.

If such were Shelley's political views, once they are given lyrical and dramatic power, there is bound to result great world poetry and drama. Such is Prometheus Unbound, Shelley's escape to a dream world of political and social perfection. The idealized spirit of democracy is the guiding theme. Prometheus has been chained by Jove (Tyranny), but Necessity overthrows Jove, and in the wedding of Prometheus with Asia, (Love in nature), the rejuvenation of the human race begins.

Here again is the "desire of the moth for the star-- none the less poignant, none the less reprehensible because it can never be satisfied."<sup>39</sup> The "desire" is the same as that uttered by Shelley in his other works: the desire that Love shall transform and rule the world. The dream of "the Earth one brotherhood" as the result of Prometheus being unbound is gradually unfolded in the second Act. The picture of those who go astray in their escape is given in the third scene of the second act.

More of Shelley's lyrical escape is expressed through Asia's passage:

"Dim twilight lawns, and stream-illumined caves,  
And wind-enchanted shapes of wandering mist." (l. 26-27)

Even previous to that in Act I, when the Spirits are questioned as to what they saw in human life, the first Spirit replies:

"On a battle-trumpet's blast  
I fled hither, fast, fast, fast.  
'Mid the darkness upward cast.  
From the dust of creeds outworn,  
From the tyrant's banner torn.  
Gathering 'round me, onward borne,  
There was mingled many a cry----  
Freedom! Hope! Death! Victory!"

Here are the defeated dreams of the poets and philosophers for a better state of civilization.

More escape poetry is recorded in the spirit's wars as he meets Asia and Panthea in Act II, scene IV.

"My coursers are fed with lightening,  
They drink of the whirlwind's stream,  
And when the red morning is bright'ning  
They bathe in the fresh sunbeam;  
They have strength for their swiftness I deem.

The precipitousness of this passage seems to be impelled by the frenzy, as well as the intense, soul-absorbing desire of Shelley for escape.

Asia's lyric which closes Act II is immortal for its beauty and its expression of lyrical escapism!

"My soul is an enchanted boat,  
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float  
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;  
And thine doth like an angel sit  
Beside a helm conducting it.

The poem is too long to quote at length but the poet continues with the lyrical description of the ideal escape to

"sail on, away, afar  
Without a course, without a star,  
But, by the instinct of sweet music driven;  
Till through Elysian garden islets  
.....  
The boat of my desire is guided."

The mystical regeneration of earth occurs in Act III, scene 13 when Prometheus kisses the Earth and it is rejuvenated. There will be no more Death for "Death is the veil which these who live call life." (l. 113)

Upon the dethronement of Jupiter and the release of Prometheus, the wonders of the universe that have transpired are described by the Spirit of

the Hour. In summary

"All things had put their evil nature off  
Like an old garment soiled and overthrown."<sup>40</sup>

The third act closes with the picture of regenerated man:

"The loathesome mask has fallen, the man remains  
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself; just, gentle, wise."

The final paean of *Escape Triumphant* is sung in the closing lines of the poem:

"This is the day, which down the void abyss,  
At the Earth-born's spell yawns for Heaven's despotism.  
And Conquest is dragged captive through the deep:  
Love, from its awful throne of patient power  
In the wise heart, from the last giddy hour  
Of dream endurance, from the slippery, steep,  
And narrow verge of crag-like agony, springs  
And folds over the world its healing wings.

Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,  
These are the seals of that most firm assurance  
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;  
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity  
Mother of many acts and hours, should free  
The serpent that would clasp her with his length;  
These are the spells by which to reassume  
An empire o'er the disentangled doom.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;  
To defy power, which seems omnipotent;  
To love and hear; to hope till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;  
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone, Life, Empire, and Victory."

"Shelley's world was the world of the utilitarian Godwin and the

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<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Peck, op. cit., II, p. 140.

mathematical Condorcet."<sup>41</sup> Shelley recognized a world thoroughly in discord. Granted that he was lyricist, nevertheless, even his greatest work, bears undeniable evidence that the inevitable in life, wars and oppression, "follies and crime, kings and priests, hangmen and inquisitors, poverty and luxury" contended for first place in the minds of men and in the plans of the world.

Force, imposture, institutions were to Shelley powers that had to be destroyed not tolerated. As has been shown, "Queen Mab" reveals Shelley's realism. His later triumph, Prometheus Unbound in the character Fury, is reminiscent of his earlier realism:

"The good want power, but to weep barren tears,  
The powerful goodness want-- worse need for them.  
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom,  
And all best things are thus confused to ill.  
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,  
But live among their suffering fellow-men  
As if none felt; they know not what they do."

However, Shelley was confirmed in his belief concerning the goodness of man, and the ultimate triumph of that virtue. Although he was sensitively aware of the intermittent struggle of good and evil, nevertheless once emotion excites his mind, on the wings of his lyricism he breaks forth in mighty verses of beauty and depth, probably only the greater because of his intense realism.

Surely no poet was more sensitive to the wrongs of man, the weaknesses of human institutions and the unorthodox conceptions of a Deity, than the supreme escapist, Shelley.

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H.N. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin and Their Circle, p. 213.

## CHAPTER V

### Keats: The Escapist In Conflict.

If we look upon Wordsworth, as the mature escapist, who knew what he wanted both for himself and society and tried to find it by eschewing commonplace haunts and devices, then we must look upon Keats as the adolescent, the immature escapist, who was not quite sure what he wanted, neither for himself and surely not for society, and did not know how to escape.

The escape theme, as such, is evident in Keats as a result of his own immature, yet audacious vision, and then as a result of the temper of the times. No one was more influenced by the Romantic quest and its concomitant escape than Keats. He did not know whither to escape; he had built for himself no ivory tower, no Pantisocratic dream, no humanitarian ideal. Instead, the most tangible of fleeting Beauty, he clung to with all his force and tried to wrench from it his own escape. That tangible form of Beauty was for him Sensuous Beauty, Beauty such as appealed to the ear and to the eye, Beauty of tone and Beauty of color and lineament. On that superficial cult would Keats establish escape from a world that frightened him by its materialism, and stabbed him by its criticism, and all-but drove him to death.

Keats' unique type of escape must be critically defined and cautiously outlined before attempting to analyze the poetry. Escapism for Keats has a

signification that is more intangible than tangible, more suppressed than expressed. The reason for this is probably that Keats halted midway in his life of sensations. Normally sensations come to the reader from the imagination of the writer, clothed in images, transcribed in relatively familiar idiom. Not so with Keats. His poetry is one of sensation. He brings into play "concrete notions, images and qualities," but they are not familiar enough for the reader. His art is "all aspiration and desire."<sup>1</sup> He writes beyond the singing human sphere, not for it.

Keats' escaping is a throbbing, vital one, though. He had definite creeds, and cost what it would to his sensitive nature he would pursue them. He believed the imagination was the truth finding faculty. "What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth, whether it existed before or not."<sup>2</sup> He pursued the Principle of Beauty in all things, but it was a Beauty so sumptuous in detail and so inwrought with humanity's own life that details overpower the average reader.

Life was portrayed for him in tones of Beauty; hence his constant escaping is to Beauty and more Beauty through a life of sensations.

"O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts! It is a vision in the form of youth; a shadow of reality to come."<sup>3</sup> He sought not only for a life of sensation rather than thoughts; but of beauty rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Legouis & Cazamian, History of English Literature, p. 1093.

<sup>2</sup> C.H. Herford, Age of Wordsworth, p. 265.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Woodberry, The Inspiration of Poetry, p. 43.

logic; of sight rather than inference; of direct rather than mediate perceptions of the divine.

Beauty to him was a faith; the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen, "a shadow of the reality to come." The dream of Immortal Beauty was his goal, driven to escape as he was from the transiency of man. "He never boldly confronted the realities of life, but sought to escape from them into a world of his own creations."<sup>4</sup> He was "straining at particles of light in a great darkness." For

"Every man whose soul is not a clod  
Hath visions and would speak."<sup>5</sup>

He further justifies his peculiar escape when he cries out defiantly:

"He ne'er is crowned  
With immortality, who fears to follow  
Where airy voices lead."<sup>6</sup>

Besides the desire for the fruitituous fulfillment of his hunger for sensations, there is a second connotation, less important to Keats's escapism. That is the escape from the strife of human hearts. There is a conflict between what he wants to write--what his inner being cries out for, and what he ought to write--what the world needs! This conflict is evidenced in "Endymion" as will be shown later and also in "Sleep and Poetry." "Hyperion" is an attempt at philosophy; "Ode to Pysche" a recourse to the mind and Roberts holds that the last five poems of his life show the triumph

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<sup>4</sup> E. deSelincourt, Keats, p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Kurtz, Pursuit of Death, p. 64.



of sensations.<sup>7</sup> He comments that the line in "Lamia"

"Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?" (ll. 229-230)

indicates that Keats is convinced that

"The essence of true poetry lies in his own  
senses, in spite of the fact that he thought he  
ought to find it in a humanitarian attitude toward  
life and man."<sup>8</sup>

In this escaping to sensuous Beauty there is a precariousness and an instability that even Keats knew. It sounds like an undertone through his poetry. It is a foreboding of winter with springtime "far behind." He craved for his poetry fullness of life and for his spirit rich sources of quietude but the instability of the quest questioned its fulfillment.

"I never feel quite certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its beauty, and I find myself very young-minded, even in that perceptive power."<sup>9</sup>

He wonders if it would not be better to be a common man.

"They seek no wonder but the human face  
No music but the happy-noted voice."<sup>10</sup>

Keats further hesitates in his escape to Sensuous Beauty alone when, in "Sleep and Poetry," he asks himself:

"Can I ever bid these joys farewell?  
Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life,  
Where I may find the agonies, the strife of human hearts."  
(ll. 121-124)

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<sup>7</sup> Roberts, "Poetry of Sensations," PMLA, Vol. XIV, p. 1131.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 1139.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Woodberry, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from deSelincourt, op. cit., p. 203.

"Ode on Melancholy," as well as "Lamia" and others bring out the insecurity, the doubtfulness of his arriving at his bourne after all his strenuous escaping.

The early round of his beauty was being threatened by intrusions of life, as in the following:

"The rocks were silent, the wide sea did weave  
An untumultuous fringe of silver foam  
Along the flat brown sand; I was at home  
And should have been most happy--but I ran  
Too far into the sea, where every man  
The greater on the less feeds evermore,--  
But I saw too distinct into the cave  
Of an eternal fierce destruction,  
And so from happiness I far was gone."

His glance passes lucidly from the outer to the inner source of his unhappiness, of his restlessness:

"Things cannot to the will  
Be settled, but they tease us out of thought;  
Or is it that imagination brought  
Beyond its proper bound, yet still confined,  
Lost in a sort of Purgatory blind,  
Cannot refer to any standard law  
Of either earth or heaven? It is a flaw  
In happiness, to see beyond our bourn,--  
It forces us in summer skies to mourn,  
It spoils the singing of the nightingale."<sup>11</sup>

Keats' escape was more precarious than that of the other poets because of its insecure foundations. Although all the other poets ultimately contemned the world, they nevertheless, in the beginning of their escape, and even in the end, took in the consideration the mortal frame, of man and of society. Keats sought escape by surmounting life, but his philosophy of sensuous beauty was no stabilizing theory.

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<sup>11</sup>

cf. Elliott, Cycle of Modern Poetry, p. 47 ff.

Elliott remarks that

"The kind of philosophy his (Keats') deepest nature called for was beyond his reach. He desires poetry that is great, unobtrusive...He sought a philosophy of Goethean quality--a view of life...so complete and satisfying as to be fully soluble in serene beauty."<sup>12</sup>

Hence this precariousness of Keats' escape terminates where his poetry does--in futility. His futility is more poignant than the others, because it was so intensely personal. Further, no poet sought death so arduously and realistically as the escape from all escaping, as did Keats.

And so Keats exclaims:

"My fancy and its utmost blisses spread;  
Yet could I on this very midnight cease,  
And the world's gaudy ensigns  
                                  see in shreds,  
Verse, fame and beauty are intense indeed  
But death intenser--Death is Life's  
                                  high meed."

This was at the end of the trail, when the Day-Star, and Noon-Day Sun had waned and Evening-Star came up over the horizon.

Aware, then, of the precariousness, the delicacy of Keats' escape we turn to his poetry for those evidences which make him an escapist poet.

Keats' entire life was suffused with poetry. He shifted from form to form, from style to style, all the while, pouring his hot throbbing life into every mould.<sup>13</sup> All the while comes back the cry: "Give me new Phoenix wings to fly at my desire." (Written Before Re-Reading "King Lear"). His

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<sup>12</sup> G.R. Elliott, "The Real Tragedy of Keats," PMLA, Vol. XXXVI.

<sup>13</sup> J.R. Lowell, Among my Books, p. 314.

early "Epistle to my brother George" re-echoes the same strain. He is expressing "the mood of escape from drudgery, the mood of delighted impression."<sup>14</sup> Then he realizes all this is only fancy and he regrets:

"Could I, at once, my mad ambition smother,  
For tasting joys like these, sure I should be  
Happier, and dearer to society." (ll. 108-110)

How Keats, in common with the other romantic poets, yet in his own distinct way, desired to find in his own sensuous poetic experience satisfaction for his whole nature, moral and intellectual, will now be traced. That desire is the outgrowth of the vicissitudes of his own life, as well as the inner urgings of his poetic faculties. Early from London haunts comes the sonnet; "Solitude":

"O Solitude! If I must with thee dwell  
Let it not be among the jumbled heap  
Of murky buildings; climb with me the steep,--  
Nature's observatory--whence the dell,  
Its flowery slopes, its river's crystal swell,  
May seem a span;" (ll. 1-6)

Although Keats was prepared for the medical profession, his early poems bear witness to his continual desire for escape from the monotonous routine such a life implied for him. So from that mundane job he wishes release because poetry could not dwell with him in such a locale as the London Borough.

"But might I now each passing moment give  
To the coy muse, with me she would not live  
In this dark city." "To George Felton Mathew," 1.31-33.

Perhaps he had broken his bonds for a moment and climbed out of the dingy Borough; his escape is more certain in a sonnet of the early summer, 1816:

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<sup>14</sup> A. Lowell, Keats, p. 158.

"To one who has been long in city pent,  
 'Tis very sweet to look into the fair  
 And open face of heaven--to breathe a prayer  
 Full in the smile of the blue firmament."<sup>15</sup>

Successful publication of "Solitude" sonnet broke him from the trammels of mundane existence. "He must now be with Nature and Poetry. He walked the Heath; he stood tiptoe upon his little hill:"<sup>16</sup> Further, I must go away to Margate the sea."<sup>17</sup> As later with Byron, the sea releases thus the spirit for Keats.

Keats escapes from the present thus:

"And other spirits there are standing apart  
 Upon the forehead of the age to come;  
 These will give the world another heart,  
 And other pulses." "Addressed to Haydon" (ll. 9-12)

Early in life, Keats deprived of a classical education, becomes impregnated with Hellenism. It, no doubt, was a subconscious escape from uninspiring work at hand. Reading and a thirst for knowledge brought to his sensuous nature the love of Greece, and ancient art. Besides this, there were the friendships with Severn and Haydon who introduced him to the remains of the sculptures of the Greek Parthenon. "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles" contains these lines:

"My spirit is too weak; mortality  
 Weighs heavily on me the unwilling sleep...  
 And each imagined pinnacle and steep  
 Of godlike hardship tells me I must die  
 Like a sick eagle looking at the sky." (ll. 1-5)

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<sup>15</sup> J.M. Murry, Studies in Keats, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

The last line, particularly, is full of the crest-fallen escapist--to escape to Beauty such as these sights conjure up. And the companion poem; "To Haydon," is full of the escapist Keats in conflict with thwarted desires:

"Haydon! forgive me that I cannot speak  
Definitely of these mighty things;  
Forgive me, that I have not eagle's wings,  
That what I want I know not where to seek."

Probably the reaction to this first acquaintance with ancient Beauty is best summed up, figuratively, in the sonnet, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." Murry characteristically analyzes the climatic rise in the sonnet itself as Keats, new conquistador of ancient lore, standing upon the peak in Darien" silent. That is typically Keats, in full bloom of his escapism, looking out on new worlds of Beauty which he may incorporate into his life. Henceforth his poetry must be evaluated not as sensuous poetry alone, but against the rich background of ancient, Hellenistic traditions.

More than that, in poetic form Keats was influenced by writers of the Renaissance--Spenser, Chapman, Fletcher, Milton, Boccaccio.

In subject matter, "Lamia" is based on Philostratus' biography; "Isabella" harks of the "De Cameron"; in "Endymion" we see the voluptuous Elizabethan poems on classical themes; in "The Eve of St. Agnes," Spenser and Chatterton; in "Hyperion," Milton; in "The Fall of the Hyperion," Dante; in "The Eve of St. Mark," the Chaucer of the early vision poems; in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and "My Merrilies," two different aspects of balladry.<sup>18</sup> Keats' very sensuousness is an escape and a rebellion, against the metrical monotony of the previous age of classicism, and also against

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<sup>18</sup>H.N. Fairchild, The Romantic Quest, p. 306.

its lack of sensuousness. Subject matter, also, is a decided departure from prevalent themes.

Therefore, Keats most definitely is a poet of the past in his escapism. Perhaps he is the climax of the escape into Medievalism. Wordsworth was unable to even temporarily cut himself off from the present to become a medievalist, nor Coleridge, nor Byron, nor Shelley--but Keats wholly submerged himself in the grandeur of the past. He saw it first through Elizabethan eyes: Spenser was his open sesame, then again, the romantic temper of his times left its most indelible stamp on Keats in its Medievalism.

"Lo! I must tell a tale of chivalry;

For large whites plumes are dancing in my eye."

"Specimen of an Induction to a Poem. (ll. 1-3)

The meaning of "Endymion" is open to criticism. On one point, all are agreed--its sensuousness, in speaking of an age long-since past. The story? No matter whose interpretation is adhered to:- Murry or Finney, deSelincourt or Bradley, Brown or Kurtz--one dominant note is heard; that is, that "Endymion" is an escape from reality.

Murry remarks: "Endymion's love-sick wanderings in search of the moon goddess are palpably the wanderings of the soul in search of the ideal, and the metamorphosis of the Indian Maid into the Goddess signifies that the road to this ideal lies through surrender to beauty in the particular."<sup>19</sup> Is "Endymion" still more? Is it a Neo-Platonic quest, in which the more the Ideal Beauty is experienced, the more intense becomes the escape so that the escape rises step-wise from appreciation of beauty of nature to appreciation

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<sup>19</sup> J.M.Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, p. 28.

of the beauty of art, to realization of the Beauty inherent in friendship and sympathy for humanity, and finally culminating in love--escape in ecstasy? Is Keats seeking immortality, unity with essence--as he terms it? That is not wholly improbable. "Endymion" questioning himself says: "Wherein lies happiness?"--and the answer is:

"In that which becks  
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,  
A fellowship with essence." (ll. 777-779)

In Book II, the breathlessness of the escape from things mundane, from "dull mortality's harsh net" is intensified by the picturesqueness of the escaping poet on the fleeing chariot. The story of Book III is Keats in his grandeur through the words of another. All he would desire to experience in his life of sensations, he has the "grey-hair'd creature," a fisherman, relate as his experiences.

When Keats writes: "For what a height my spirit is contending," he delineated it picturesquely in "Endymion."

Keats pursued Beauty everywhere, and then with that innate precariousness of his escape he cries out:

"I have clung  
To nothing, loved a nothing, nothing seen  
Or felt but a dream.....  
There never lived a mortal now, who bent  
His appetite beyond his natural sphere,  
But starved and died."

In "The Fall of Hyperion" Keats realizes that a humanitarian philosophy which Endymion lacked, might be the solution to his never-ending escape. Perhaps "the fulfillment of individuality can come only through entering into,



losing the essence of your own life in the life of your fellows."<sup>20</sup>

The first "Hyperion" was an escape from the memory of Keats' brother Tom's death. As the first Hyperion is an escape from a specific sorrow, the last Hyperion is an escape from all the ills of society.

Beauty has greater significance for Keats, the man, than for Keats, the London idealist of former years. A backward glance from the peaks of the "Hyperion" and "Endymion" reveals the development of the poet. In "Sleep and Poetry" he self-consciously testifies to his aspirations at the outset of his career:

"O for ten years, that I may overwhelm  
Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed  
That my own soul has to itself decreed.  
Then will I pass the countries that I see  
In long perspective, and continually  
Taste their pure fountains, First the realm I'll pass  
Of Flora, and old Pan; sleep in the grass,  
Feed upon apples red, and strawberries,  
And choose each pleasure that my fancy sees;  
Catch the white-handed nymphs in shady places,  
To woo sweet kisses from averted faces,--  
Play with their fingers, touch their shoulders white  
Into a pretty shrinking with a bite  
As hard as lips can make it: till agreed,  
A lovely tale of human life we'll read. (ll. 96-110)

On further thinking he realizes there is another side to life: agony and trial and pain--but inevitably Keatian--there is

"a car  
And steeds with shaggy manes--the charioteer  
Looks out upon the winds with glorious fear;" (ll. 127-129)

The return of the journey is less jubilant, as evidenced in "The Fall of Hyperion":

"Majestic shadow, tell me: sure not all  
Those melodies sung into the World's ear  
Are useless: sure a poet is a sage;  
A humanist, physician to all men.  
That I am none I feel, as vultures feel  
They are no birds when eagles are abroad."

This same mood is carried on in his ode, "To a Nightingale," where intensely he exclaims:

"That I might...leave the world unseen,  
.....  
Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan".

Away! away for I will fly to thee  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pard,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy." (ll. 19-33)

Both this ode and "Ode to a Grecian Urn" have "as their common starting point, a mood of despondent contemplation of life, in which beauty perishes and passion cloy."21

The height of his escape now is to cease upon the midnight with no pain. "Fairylands" of romance and enchantment, of superficial escape have become "forlorn"--devoid of satiety--and he is "tolled" back from "The Nightingale" "To my sole self."

In the other ode, Keats seeks surcease in the ideal eternity of Art:

"For ever pipings song for ever new.....  
Forever panting, for ever young.

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Herford, op. cit., p. 264.

"Thou silent form! dost tease us out of thought  
 As doth Eternity: Cold Pastoral!  
 When old age shall this generation waste,  
 Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe  
 Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st  
 "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"--that is all  
 Ye know on earth and all ye need to know." (ll. 24, 44-50)

To escape commonplace existence Keats advises escape thru Fancy as in the Poem "To Fancy" he advises that the man sitting by the fireside send his Fancy--high commissioned:

"She will bring, in spite of frost,  
 Beauties that the earth hath lost."

All things pass and "Everything is spoilt by use" except Fancy.

"To Psyche" is pagan in tone, but to the ancient paganism Keats begs admittance.

"So let me be thy choir, and make a moan  
 Upon the midnight hours;  
 Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet...  
 Yes I will be thy priest." (ll. 44-50)

The ode "On Melancholy" starts with an attempted flight from Reality--with nothing more of promise than "to fade far away, dissolve and quite forget."

"This is only half-escape"--it is upon the viewless wings of Poesy that he must take his true escape; it is a flight into that one possible world which offered a release--the world of the imagination."<sup>22</sup>

"To Autumn" is a rebound to a more joyous aspect of the escapist Keats.

"All the pangs of romantic longing and classic aspiration and fore-

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<sup>22</sup> Snow, "Heresy Concerning Keats," PMLA, Vol. XLIII, p. 1149.

boding pass over into a brooding and mellow content--the mood of autumn, disturbed by no regret for the songs of spring...by no foreboding of winter; but likewise also impelled by no foretelling of the spring that should follow."<sup>23</sup>

Keats, as individual or social escapist, saw no solution as Shelley did. He painted no future world for himself or others. No "Triumph of Life" issues from Keats' escapism; instead there is only the threnody of death from Keats' pen.

The awareness of the brevity of his life and the meagre productiveness of his poetic attempts together with his immature philosophic speculations haunted him in his last years.

"Notsatisfied with the "utmost blisses" of fancy, distraught by those dark actualities which his veracity made him face, and yet needing high repose of spirit for the full fruition of his poetic genius, he sought the peace of wisdom; but this being too far from him, his spirit leaned toward the stillness of death.

"But this is human life; the war, the deeds,  
The disappointment, the anxiety,  
Imagination's struggles, for and nigh,  
All human. (Endymion III)

The unutterable escape is penned in "Hyperion":

"Without stay or proofs  
But my own weak mortality, I bore  
The load of this eternal quietude...  
.....oftentimes I prayed  
Intense that death would take me from the vale  
And all its burdens."

He suggests in his music a yearning for a peace which in life he could not win:

<sup>23</sup>Herford, op. cit., p. 265.

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard  
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;  
Not to the sensual ear, but, none endeared,  
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone." (ll. 11-14)

I believe Murry not wrong when he writes:

"Escape was not in Keats' destiny, even the effort after it was an unnatural condition for one who strove instinctively to submit himself completely to experience."<sup>24</sup>

However this very submission to experience, since life was just opening for Keats, did have some painful moments, from which Keats would escape and I believe the poems quoted offer sufficient circumstance for incorporating him among the escape poets.

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<sup>24</sup>

Murry, op. cit., p. 62.

## CHAPTER VI

### Byron - The Escapist of Futility.

To understand Byron and the escapist tendencies in his poetry it is necessary to know Byron, the man. His poetry is so much a part of him, that unless it is interpreted against the background of events in his life, it has no message and little meaning as escapist poetry. Of all the Romantic poets considered here, Byron is the most personal in his works. Courthope titles his chapter on Byron as "Romantic Self-representation." Hence if Byron lived with himself so much in his poetry, it is obvious that to ascertain that undercurrent of escapism that is evident, we must consider the personality of Byron. Having done that, it will be easier to chronologically follow the escape theme in his poems. This study of Byron is to be done chronologically, since it seems the most logical. There is no development of philosophy as in Wordsworth or Shelley; no maturing of ideas as in Coleridge. Byron is all there and all at once. He springs the complete personality at once before our eyes. Maturing years only confirm him in his satiric outlook on life. In his poem, Hours of Idleness he admits:

"Weary of love, of life, devoured with spleen,  
I rest a perfect Timon, not nineteen."

"Childish Recollections," (ll. 19-20)

Byron was the type of character who justified his actions by paradoxes. He sought all his life for the formula to life which he had set up for him-

self in his youthful days at Harrow. Then he had been brazen, independent, arrogant, boastful. Experiences that now and later would shock his friends he delighted to expose and indulge in. Pride of rank and of personality had instigated him to glory in his role, "for all the world's a stage." He had gloried that he in his life fitted in with the temper of the times: the age of the French Revolution, the age of Napoleon. "Trafalgar and Waterloo were contemporary moments." He was as a great personality filling the world, like a world-hero. At the age of nine, he was great in the noise he could create, when he wrote a poem against an old lady whom he disliked. At nineteen he was pompous in his revolt against educational standards of the day.

"At twenty-four, he is the most famous poet of the day, the idol of one London season and cast out with horror by the next, an exile from his country, equally condemned and admired, credited with abnormal wickedness and abnormal genius, confessing himself defiantly to the world, making a public show of a very genuine misery, living with ostentatious wildness in Venice, reclaimed to a kind of irregular domesticity, giving up everything, life itself, in the cause of liberty and for a tradition of heroes, a hero in death."<sup>1</sup>

This is the Byron who cried out, "To withdraw myself from myself--, oh, that cursed selfishness has ever been my sole, my entire, my sincere motive in scribbling at all."<sup>2</sup> He would consider himself the center of the universe yet he would endeavor to escape from himself. In his works, The Bride of Abydos, The Corsair, Lara, his dynamic personality would be exploited by himself. But society ostracizing him revealed the real man, hurling himself with volcanic strength against the world. Only the mighty, the great

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<sup>1</sup> A.Symons, Romantic Movement in Poetry, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

were his friends. Yet Byron recognizes the finiteness of human knowledge and ability when trying to understand infinity.

By nature Byron is anti-social; yet he flings himself into the midst of European society and finally pledges himself to the Cause of Greek Independence. Here is more of the contradiction in Byron.

Always an essential member of mankind, first in his prime, as a noble, then expatriated, Byron was at once "the victim and master of the world." Nevertheless it is for life that Byron pleads, for the naked, barren contact with humanity. His is the cosmopolitan mind that takes in the whole of life, not only in its barbarous thrusts, which a full experience gave him. He takes in the whole of Europe, its courts, its politics, its events, its rulers, as another man might comprehend the affairs and gossips, as well as the petty administration of his hamlet. One thing Byron did not take in, and that is the result of all his intense speculation and experience. He did not penetrate far enough--far into the realm, where all this must cease--into silence, where men's thought must stop, and await not active participation but passive acceptance of what lies ahead. Therefore much of Byron's poetry and even of the escape tendencies is superficial in thought.

Another contradiction in the personality of Byron is his remorse and almost fear of the consequences inevitable from the rash acts of his life. Here is duality. He boasts to have tasted life to the lowest dregs; he glories in it. But the "blight of life, the demon thought" pointed out for him the emptiness of the fullest life.

This brief character sketch of Byron, the escapist, can be summed up in his own words in "Manfred":



"This should have been a noble creature: he  
 Hath all the energy which should have made  
 A goodly frame of glorious elements,  
 Had they been wisely mingled; as it is,  
 It is an awful chaos--light and darkness--  
 And mind and dust--and passions and pure thoughts,  
 Mixed, and contending without end or order,  
 All dormant and destructive." (III, ll. 160-167)

Byron's escapist tendencies can be summed up in three steps of development, which are current with his advance from youth to maturity. They are, first emotion, then self-assertion and defiance, and finally satiric mockery.

Byron the youth lashed friend and foe with irresistible bitterness "as if his egregious egotism could find relief only in baying at the world." His poem of collected pieces, Hours of Idleness, shows this tendency. He rails at the most beautiful things in life, which in his youth came to him: romance, friendship. Every poem begins ecstatically but the inevitable Byronic twist comes at the end. Even in the broad passion of his youth

"Byron flung himself upon the world to master and enjoy it but how soon he learned in his own person the narrow range of human freedom. He learned that the gods were stronger than man, and often placed an infinite seeking soul in a finite body....Since for Byron every limit was a barrier; every man a chain, since he flung his angry challenge against nature and destiny and only in complete emancipation lay for him happiness, he seemed a leader."<sup>3</sup>

This hunger for escape was dictated partly by Byron's early training in the creed of pre-destination of the strict Calvinistic church. Episcopalian and Anglican doctrines, too, narrowed his mind, and eliminated responsibility

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<sup>3</sup>  
 W.A. Briscoe, Byron the Poet, p. 94.

for personal acts. It was against this idea of pre-destined sin and its retribution that Byron so often flung his wings. In the third canto of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage he exclaims:

"Yet let us ponder boldly -- 'tis a base  
 Abandonment of reason to resign  
 Our right of thought--our last and only place  
 Of refuge; this, at least, shall still be mine:  
 Though from our birth the faculty divine  
 Is chain'd and tortured--cabin'd, cribb'd, confined,  
 And bred in darkness, lest the truth should shine  
 Too brightly on the unprepared mind,  
 The beam pours in, for time and skill will couch the blind."  
 (Canto IV, Stanza. CXXVII)

It is easily seen that transcendentalism did not attract Byron. That would have implied an overriding of natural forces, and imbued as Byron was in determinism and necessitarianism, no soaring of the spirit was compatible with these creeds.

Byron is seen fitting in the psychological scheme of human escaping in Paul Elmer More's survey of the position of man since the time of the Renaissance. In medieval times the soul of man was the centre of the universe. The divine drama of salvation revolved around man's personality and so that became the one matter of vast importance in the universal scheme of things. The first romantic flush of the Renaissance made the world, no longer theo-centric, all lives tending to the God of the soul of man, but homo-centric, man himself the center. Then in this second Romantic upheaval man is still the center of the universe, but stripped of the restricting laws he gives himself to wild vagaries. The continental philosophy of Rousseau and Voltaire stimulated this attitude toward life. "It was under this stimulus that those who were unable to silence the inner need amidst

the turmoil of action turned to the outer world, seeking there the comfort of an idealism not attainable in the vague abstractions of humanity."<sup>4</sup> Here is the position of Byron.

Hence under this impulse and also as the typical child of the age in which he lived, Byron turned to an attempt of a mystic fellowship with nature.

"I live not in myself, but I become  
 Portion of that around me; and to me  
 High mountains are a feeling, but the hum  
 Of human cities torture: I can see  
 Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be  
 A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,  
 Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,  
 And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain  
 Of ocean, or the stars, mingle and not in vain."  
 Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (Canto III, stanza LXXII)

It is not often that Byron reaches this transcendental attitude toward nature, nor does he retain it long. There is a personal reason for that. Nature would not long let him rest, but becomes "painfully human" to him and seems a "sort of external memory, recorded in symbols." He records in his Swiss Journal, what he later incorporated in "Manfred." "Passed whole woods of withered pines, all withered; trunks stripped and barkless; branches lifeless, done by a single winter their appearance reminded me of me and my family."<sup>5</sup>

Byron's escape to nature from the exterior world of men, is his own expression "to the most untenable of paradoxes--that one escapes from solitude by eschewing human haunts in favor of some wilderness."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> P.E. More, "Wholesome Revival of Byron," Atlantic Monthly, p. 805.

<sup>5</sup> A. Symons, op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> I. Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism, p. 280.

"To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell  
 To slowly trace the forest's shady scene,  
 Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,  
 And mortal foot hath ne'er so rarely been;  
 To climb the trackless mountain unseen,  
 With the wild flock that never needs a fold;  
 Alone o'er steep and foaming falls to lean,  
 This is not solitude; 'tis but to hold  
 Converse with Nature's charms and view her stores unroll'd."  
 Childe Harold, (Canto II, stanza XXV)

His escape from the world of man is perhaps more impetuous, and ambitious because of the motive, namely, peace for himself. No man, once he lost himself in solitude could come between him and nature. So un-Byronic, the hero in Childe Harold's Pilgrimage would be a hermit. Satiety could be obtained by dwelling with nature, Byron believes. At the end of the twenty-seventh stanza of this canto, Byron injects the real reason for this escape to nature, as is evident throughout this nature worship theme of Byron's. He goes to nature to forget the world he hates. That society is alone for him.

"There is a society where none intrudes,  
 By the deep sea, and music in its roar;  
 I love no Man the less, but Nature more,  
 From these our interviews, in which I steal  
 From all I may be, or have been before,  
 To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
 What I can ne'er express, yet can not all conceal."  
Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, (canto IV, clxxxvii)

Society and nature are subjectively colored by his own personality. Torrents and mountain crags, high mountain peaks, glowing sunsets are the externalizing of his own personality, his own wants to himself. As Brooks remarks:

"Byron sought to come into solitary contact with Nature,  
 to realize and to describe what he saw, but in this

relation what he chiefly did was to describe how the beauty and sublimity of Nature affected himself."<sup>7</sup>

For an unsatisfying period of his life, Byron takes refuge in a melodramatic isolation from society, exulting with nature in moody revenge and unutterable mysteries. Especially the first two cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage are the glorification, and the auto-biography of the soul-escaping Byron. He would "unburden his soul of its self-engendered torture in solitary communion with nature, and would find relief from the vulgar cant of the present in profound recollection on the grandeurs of the past."<sup>8</sup>

Hence, too, his "first angers with life" found an opportunity for escape in his voluntary abandoning of England. "Some air of freer breath, some horizon to wander in,"<sup>9</sup> challenged him. That too vivid sense of humanity, he also sought to escape. No poet ever loved human society more, and no one ever tried more desperately to escape it.

"Condemning him 'to plunge into the crowd,' it leaves him at the crowd's mercy, as he sensitively feels the shock of every disturbance which he causes there. Driving him into solitude for an escape, it will not let him even there escape the thought of what in himself is so much an epitome of humanity, for 'quiet to quick bosoms is hell.'"<sup>10</sup>

It is not that Byron is dissatisfied with the world that he wants to

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<sup>7</sup> S.A. Brooke, Naturalism in English Poetry, p. 252.

<sup>8</sup> More, op. cit., p. 899.

<sup>9</sup> G.E. Woodberry, The Inspiration of Poetry, p. 88.

<sup>10</sup> Symons, op. cit., p. 259.

escape it. It is really a too great love for it. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage is so autobiographical of this phase of Byron's life that once more we quote the famous third canto.

"To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind;  
 All are not fit with them to stir and toil,  
 Nor is it discontent to keep the mind  
 Deep in its fountain, lest it overboil  
 In the hot throng, where we become the spoil  
 Of our infection, till too late and long  
 We may deplore and struggle with the coil,  
 In wretched interchange of wrong for wrong  
 Midst a contentious world, striving where none are strong."  
 (Stanza LXIX)

From the disappointments of life, Byron constantly strove to escape. From pleasure to pleasure, from one form of violence to another he fled; desirous of sensation, of power, of fame, his escape seems inexhaustible. From the very day that he planned his Mediterranean cruise, his escaping, fleeing career continued, until he lay dying in the army tent on the plains of Greece. The other poets had not expressed their escape so exteriorly but Byron hoped in each new escape, each new lawless, impetuous, wild adventure to have finished with all escaping.

The final awareness of this futility drove him to the last stage of his poetic inspiration, satire and mockery, toward the earth and all it represented. With the satire of Don Juan he cried out:

"Now . . . Imagination droops her pinion,  
 And the sad truth that hovers o'er my desk  
 Turns what was once romantic to burlesque."

The constant escape in Byron's wild debauchery on the Continent was continued in various ways:

"Byron often said that he regarded work only as an escape from the circumstances of his life. Work, clearly, was

more than this for him; but his assertion was true so far as it went. The rate at which he has been devising his escape during the past two years or so had left its mark; also it showed plainly how desperate a necessity the escape was."<sup>11</sup>

Throughout his career in Italy, the ceaseless struggle to escape is evident. Although fame had attended him for many years, he was now beginning to feel himself in the scheme of society as: nothing. To a man of Byron's calibre it was the one thing from which he would attempt an escape. He himself remarked: "I have not the least idea where I am going nor what I am to do."

Byron's championing of the Greek cause was only another avenue of escape for this badly disillusioned, broken spirit. His turbulent spirit could never be quelled.

"It was too deeply seated for that and it is doubtful whether even a victorious return from Greece could have guided him into anything like a settled tranquillity of mind... As it is Byron remains always a restless, warring, frustrated spirit, conscious almost from his birth of some forbidden land. Delight, success, power, virtues of heart and mind,--these he knew in abundance, but peace he always missed. It seemed now to have drifted finally beyond his reach, if not beyond his will."<sup>12</sup>

The spirit of historic Italy was a means of temporary escape. It is then that Byron acknowledges.

"My days are in the yellow leaf;  
The flowers and the fruit of love are gone;  
The worm, the canker, and the grief  
Are mine alone."

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<sup>11</sup> J. Drinkwater, The Pilgrim of Eternity, p. 287.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

That he has attempted to escape from that which follows every man he admits:

"The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree  
I planted,--they have torn me,--and I bleed:  
I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed."  
(*"Epistle to Augusta," Stanza X*)

Finding no surcease in the present, Byron looks to the future and entertains a vague hope.

"Yet if, as holiest men have deem'd there be  
A land of souls beyond that sable shore,  
To shame the doctrine of the Sadducee  
And sophists, madly vain of dubious lore;  
How sweet it were in concert to adore  
With those who made our mortal labours light  
To hear each voice we fear'd to hear no more  
Behold each mighty shade reveal'd to sight,  
The Bactrian, Samian, sage and all who taught the right."  
(*Canto II, Stanza VIII*)

We can summarize the activities of the broken and defeated escapist in Byron in his own words:

"We wither from our youth, we gasp away--  
Seasick; unfound the boon, unslaked the thirst  
Though to the last, in verge of our decay  
Some phantom lures, such as we sought at first  
But all too late--so are we doubly curst.  
Love, Fame, Ambition, Avarice,--'tis the same,  
Each idle, and all ill--and none the worst--  
For all are meteors with a different name,  
And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame."  
Childe Harold Canto IV (CXXIV)

The exterior travail of this mournful elegy is summed up by Brooks, when he writes:

"In all his works up to and including *"Don Juan"* we have the revolt of a powerful personality against the lifelessness, and the indifference and the materialism of the world which surrounded him. Byron took refuge in considering his own character, his wrongs, his aspirations. There, he thought, is a world in full disturbance, in full revolt,



questioning, theorising, wooing, Nature to its embrace;  
like Rousseau, attacking religion; like the philosophers  
of the eighteenth century, living as it pleased him,  
independent of laws, sacrificing all its enemies."<sup>13</sup>

In the fourth canto of Childe Harold there is revealed a peace and calm  
that has been foreign to his works previously.

In Manfred, there is expressed a certain immortality of the mind; even  
a high note in the line of stanza 155 is struck where he speaks of seeing  
St. Peter's Dome--and then--

"thou  
Shalt one day, if found worthy, so defined,  
See thy God face to face as thou dost now  
His Holy of Holies, nor be blasted by his brow."

These faint glimmerings relieve the decay, disillusionment, destruction  
which are the usual elements of Byron.

It was Chesterton, writing on the optimism of Byron, who caught  
this spirit in Byron--after his life was spent.

"In Greece he heard the cry of reality, and at the time  
that he was dying, he began to live. He heard suddenly  
the call of that buried and subconscious happiness which  
is in all of us, and which may emerge suddenly at the  
sight of the grass of a meadow or the spears of the  
enemy."<sup>14</sup>

Does that confirm Byron's own remark that

"This is to be a mortal,  
And seek the things beyond mortality"?

As a resolution to the escape theme in Byron, these speculations give  
a different color to the lavish outpouring of a self-tortured spirit. Seen

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<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> Five Types, p. 13.

in the light of the eternal escapist in Byron, his ecstatic reaches after Nature, his turbulency of rhythm, his soul-devastating dramas have a new interpretation. If finally, in the tent of Death on the plains of Greece, the man Byron began to live, then the appraisal of Byron that follows seems justified.

"Yet this libertine who so glorified sensuality and flaunted his blasphemies and cheapened love had indubitable spiritual perceptions, uneasy stirrings, gleams, and guesses, rather than any full awakening of a spiritual sense, but sufficient to show that he, too not only felt nostalgia of the soul but half suspected the direction home. When he exclaimed

"O Rome, my country city of the soul

The orphans of the heart must turn to thee,"  
it was not only upon the Rome of history that he called, for his poems are filled with evidence that his heart could never be at rest until it came to the city in the spiritual place."<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have seen the escape theme instigated by the conditions of the times. Philosophers of the day told men that there was only reason. But reason and its dictums did not satisfy man. A reaction substituted emotion and nature worship for reason. The intuitive powers of man were emphasized and the imagination was released.

Religiously, the deism of the past was worn thin. Wesleyanism and Evangelicalism brought about an emotional revival. Combined with the philosophy of Kant and Rousseau, rebellion against dogmatic conditions resulted. Escape was one of the ways that rebellion was expressed.

Finally the eighteenth century culminated in social unrest typified by the Industrial Revolution. Living and working conditions were anything but desirable.

Thus, three important factors in life: How men think; how they reason; and how they live--were being undermined. Hence reaction was expected.

Five sensitive intellectuals, contacting these conditions, and given the means with which to express their displeasure and unsympathetic attitude, have expressed in no uncertain terms their escape, their flight from these conditions.

Wordsworth and Coleridge of the first generation of Romantic poets; Shelley, Keats and Byron of the second generation, while trying to assuage

man's sorrows, built up poetic Utopias for the world. As for themselves they took to escape, as the poetry quoted in the respective chapters has proven.

Wordsworth, the philosophical escapist, is a vivid example of a theoretical and personal escape. Essentially a nature poet, Wordsworth, more than any other poet sought in Nature, the glorification of man, the establishment of a perfectly balanced social and economic government. But for himself he goes beyond Nature and ultimately comes to rest in a philosophy in which the turmoil of his own senses and his own intellect are to be comforted. His escape, he finally resolves, is to "infinite and only there."

One of the originators of the Pantisocratic scheme, Coleridge, eventually develops into the metaphysical escapist. All sensuous life becomes an abstraction. Immersed as he was in the lore of the German metaphysicians, and sensitive as he was to the irksome social conditions, it was inevitable that his aspect of life, in those features in which it is escapist, should take on a metaphysical interpretation. The absolute was the quest of Coleridge. Unattainable as that was, escape into metaphysical reality was the only solution, and Coleridge accepted it.

Although he is definitely the soaring escapist, perhaps no poet had more realistic reasons for his sudden flights into transcendental philosophy, than Shelley. No poet understood the political and social implications of the disturbed conditions of the times as he did. No poet has given more lyric utterance to his and man's escape, philosophically, religiously and socially. From his burning lyrics in which he begs for identification with

nature, through his luminous elegy, to the drama of world-escape, "Prometheus Unbound," Shelley is ever releasing new ideals for himself and for benighted society to which they may escape.

There is a decided decline in the escape theme and its evidences after Shelley. Keats is the more immature artist and less ardent spirit than any of the previous poets. From earliest youth Keats was aware of the instability of society. He was more poignantly alert to the disillusionment that meets high-minded poetic talent, such as his. Yet throughout those parts of his works, which evidence his escapism, a constant conflict is apparent. It is a personal conflict. He translates sensuous life into Beauty. Yet he realizes the bleakness of his vision and the barrenness of his inspiration for noble world-ideals that would justify escape.

By contrast Byron as an escapist poet has none of the escapist tendencies revealed in the four preceding poets of the Romantic age. Wordsworth is identified with nature philosophy and that ultimate peacefulness acquired after disillusionment with man; Byron is always one with man; he is part of the world always. It is his stage. He fled to nature not to hold it up as a creed for man to believe in, if he wished satiety, but merely for his personal relief. Coleridge, the metaphysical escapist, lived and revelled in thought from his earliest youth. To Byron, thought was his arch-enemy. Coleridge evolved a theory of poetry that today is admired and forms the basis for modern versification. It was the result, it is true, of his own metaphysical escape. Not for Byron....No one had less to offer in poetics than Byron. Critics halt when they attempt to estimate Byron's style and versification. Shelley, gay and self-abandoned to the West Wind, lived in

a world of ideals. He went far in his search for love, and speculated long and arduously before laying his permanent tenet of Shelleyian philosophy. At idealism, Byron turns satiric, ironic. He worships at the shrine of Freedom, rather than of Love. Self-representation was too potent with him to be suppressed in Love. Finally, Keats with his immaturity of vision, and devotion to sensuous beauty, is a striking contrast to the always mature Byron. Byron stands like a giant in human experience next to the adolescent Keats. As for Beauty, Byron never saw it except as the subject of his own personal feelings and almost part of himself. This then is Byron in the negative sense as an escapist. He is the last of the Romantic poets in whom the escape theme is evident. And even he already fore-shadows that ennui that the next era is to express.

The background study of the escape movement has shown that escape was a tendency caused by the conditions of the times. The expositions of the five major poets and their works have shown how that escape was voiced by them. No avenue down which they might have fled, had been left untouched by these fugitives from the world. Escape into Nature, man, approximations of the Eternal had been attempted by the Romantics. So intense became their escape that--not only great poetry resulted, but philosophies evolved, ideals for society were promulgated, and comprehensions of God in terms of the One, Beauty, and Love were penned.

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